MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S FANTASY

Magazine
Issue #21

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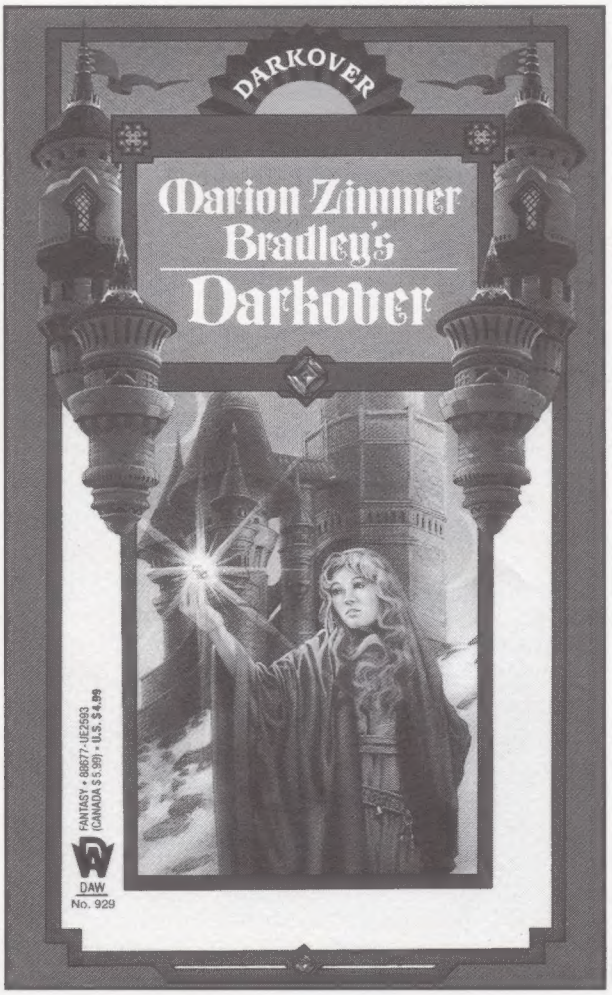

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Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage. *FANTASY Magazine*, a quarterly, publishes original all new short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 6,000 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 2,500 and 5,000 words. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers and artists at a special rate of $4.00 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' GUIDELINES should include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine

EDITORIAL

Marion Zimmer Bradley was in England when this issue went to press, so the editorial this time was written by Rachel Holmen, Publisher of FANTASY Magazine.

I have two friends who are writers. (Well, truly, I have more than two friends who write.) These writers have been friends for years and members of the same writers' workshop. They have held editorial positions at the same magazine. One is somewhat older than the other. Writer A has published novels; Writer B has a first novel still circulating in New York. Writer B recently submitted a short piece to an anthology, and Writer A has suddenly become caustic.

It grieves my heart that the established writer feels threatened by the "new" writer, because our professional field is also, at its best, a community. Which is not to say that some writers never gossip or criticize; that most writers are not incredibly protective of their own egos; or that their artistic creations are not viewed by them with the same doting eyes as fond parents at the school play, blind to everything except their offspring's splended performance in the part of toadstool, or elf, or the hind end of a horse.

I have two different friends who are writers, and one has informed the other that a certain topic, and a certain time in history, may not be used by the other writer.

Come off it! Would the world be better without **MISTS OF AVALON**, since Rosemary Sutcliff had already written about Arthur in **THE SWORD AT SUNSET**? I think not; we as readers have profited from both. (And Mallory wrote well before either.) Some years ago, I heard that Joy Chant was considering an Arthurian novel but decided not to write one, since Marion was working on **MISTS**. I still want to see what Joy Chant has to say, and I'm sure Marion would not consider me disloyal for feeling this way.

Books can be extended conversations, as each writer adds their own insights into the problems of living. And some of the most successful writers I know, maybe not financially but in terms of their personal satisfaction with their writing (we have a tendency to confuse wealth with success, but wealth is only money), are Lisa Goldstein, Michaela Roessner-Hermann, and Pat Murphy, each of whom has written a post-holocaust fantasy novel set in a different part of the San Francisco Bay Area. The three women sometimes team up to promote each other's work, sharing readings and autographings. The best writing has a context; even if that context is not directly known to the reader, it comes across and is part of what makes each story great. So please don't behave like squabbling children; write as well as *you* can. Then we as readers will *make* room in our libraries for your books.

Rachel Elaine Holmen

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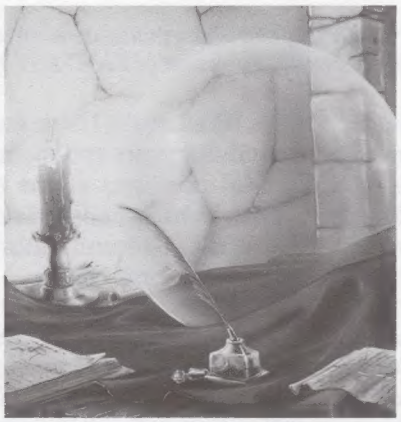

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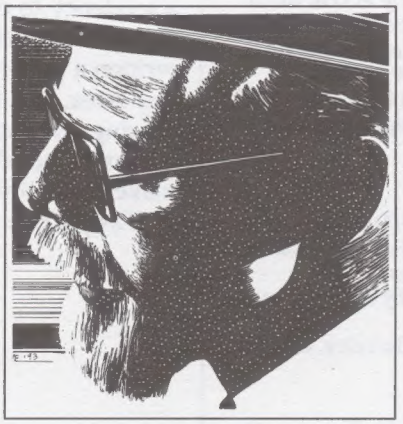

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First Love, Last Love

by Tanya Huff

"Hey Dad! There's a robin the size of a Buick on that round cement thing in the lawn."

Back bowed under the weight of half a sofa, Nigel Richards groped for the first of the cement steps with the toe of his work-boot. "Admire the wildlife later," he grunted at his oldest son. "For now, can we get this thing inside?"

"Sure, Dad. No problemo."

"Easy for you to say." Nigel shifted his grip and braced the heavy piece of furniture against his knee. "Your back is twenty-three years younger than mine." As they moved the sofa up the four steps and in through the front door he tried to remember why not hiring professional movers had seemed like such a good idea at the time. *"Raymond and I can do the heavy lifting; think of the money we'll save."* Next time, they'd spend the money.

And it's not like we don't have it to spend. Two days of Lynn's consulting fees would've covered it. After all, Lynn's consulting fees had bought them the house and the twenty-five acres of land it sat on.

"You okay, Dad?"

"Fine, Ray. Just fine." Maybe their savings could buy him a new back.

The sofa, which had dominated their living room in the city, was in turn dominated by the room it now found itself in.

"Nigel, just look at this." Box braced against her hip, Lynn Richards indicated the ceiling with a lift of her chin. "That's the original patterned tin, I'm sure of it."

"Sweetheart, as long as it stays where it is, it can be the original carved stone for all I care." He pulled himself erect on his wife's shoulder. "We have too much stuff. We should treat this place like a new beginning and simplify."

"We should have simplified before we packed it all into boxes and moved it."

"Good point."

Ray looked up from the floor where he'd thrown himself to better sort a stack of CDs. He'd personally seen to it that the stereo had been the first item unloaded and had immediately set it up; just in case it had been damaged in transit. "Yeah, Dad, no point in locking the garage after the bike's been stolen."

"Words of wisdom for our time." Nigel sank down onto the end of the sofa. "Which, oh fruit of my loins, is one of the reasons we moved. You don't have to lock the garage door out here."

"It's not a garage," declared a new voice, authoritatively. "It's a shed. And it doesn't have a door. Or much of a roof."

Nigel twisted around to face his daughter. "It doesn't need a roof, Dorrie ..."

"Doris!"

"Right. Sorry." The insistence on her full name had been a recent phenomenon. He still wasn't used to it. "It doesn't need a roof because there's less acid in the rain out here and the cars don't need the protection."

"I don't think that's right and besides, what about my baseball equipment?"

"What's wrong with the big old room behind the kitchen?"

She snorted. Only a thirteen-year-old, Nigel reflected, who'd recently discovered that her parents weren't perfect, could stack so much meaning on a single sound.

"You do realize, Father ..." Use of the word *Father* was recent vocabulary addition as well. Nigel supposed it was a protest against authority. As protests went, he could live with it.

"... that we can't get cable out here. No cable means no TSN. How am I supposed to watch my baseball games?"

"It won't hurt you to miss a few. You'll have more time to practice." Girls in his day wanted to grow up to be ... well, he supposed he didn't actually know what girls in his day had wanted, but he was pretty sure they hadn't wanted to play shortstop in the major leagues. "Where's your brother?"

Finger quivering with disdain, Doris pointed across the room.

"I meant the other one."

"Oh. Petey ran off to explore. I told him he should help unload but he never listens."

"Speaking of unloading." Lynn shoved at her husband's shoulder. "We have to have that truck back to the rental place by five and there's still two dressers and the oak buffet left to carry in."

"No problem, Mom." Ray rocked back on his heels and shot to his feet. "Me and Dad'll each take a dresser and that buffet's not as heavy as it looks." Cranking the volume up on the stereo, he danced out the door, yelling, "Come on, Dad!" back over one gyrating shoulder.

Nigel sighed and rose considerably

more slowly. "I feel old," he groaned and shuffled through drifts of crumpled newspaper to the stereo where he slid the volume down.

"DAD!" Recognizing the protest as a fair one — Ray was doing at least half of the work — he eased it back up to a compromise position. "Whatever happened to music?" he shouted over the heavy metal pounding of a Metallica ballad. When his wife shrugged and his daughter sneered, he decided he'd probably meant it as a rhetorical question anyway and followed Ray out into the yard.

"Hey Dad! You gotta come and see what I found!"

Wondering how the hell they'd gotten the buffet into the truck, Nigel didn't bother to turn. "Shouldn't you be helping your mother in the house, Peter?"

"But Dad, this is great! It's a car. A really, really old car."

"How old?" It was the wrong shape to fit on the dolly; maybe they'd turned it sideways.

"Really old." The metal truck bed echoed as Peter bounced up the ramp. "At least as old as you."

Had they laid it down? "Dad!" Nigel finally turned to face his youngest and found, as usual, his resolve couldn't stand against the enthusiasm in Peter's hazel eyes.

"Hey Dad!" Having taken both dressers into the house, Ray was ready to start on the buffet. "Where are you going?"

"Pete's found an abandoned car on our property. He's taking me to see it."

"Cool." Ray fell into step beside his brother and shoved him sideways. "Way to go, squirt."

Peter shoved back. "I'm not a squirt," he protested. "You're an orangutan."

"Bet you don't even know what an orangutan is."

"Do to. It's a big orange ape that lives in Madagascar. And you're a big orange ape that lives ... ow! Dad!"

As Nigel knew Peter was in no danger, and would in fact protest even more strongly should he interfere, he ignored the noisy battle and kept walking in the direction indicated. Ray got his carrot top from his mother but neither of them had any idea where he'd got the accompanying bulk. At fifteen he was already pushing six foot and still growing. *Taller than his father already ... Wasn't it just yesterday we brought him home from the hospital?*

A few moments later, the boys caught up. "It's through these trees. You can't even see it 'til you're right on top of it." Peter leapt over a fallen log and charged through a break in the bushes. "Come on!"

Four months short of his sixteenth birthday and automotive freedom, Ray looked thoughtful as he shoved a sapling aside. "Maybe if it's in okay shape I could restore it. You know, like it could be my car."

"Don't get your hopes up," Nigel warned him as they passed the last barricade. "It's probably ..."

"... a piece of junk," Ray finished as they emerged into the clearing and got their first look at Peter's discovery.

Behind the facade of a nearly complete body, white paint gleaming in the late afternoon sun, little more than rust remained. Unidentifiable bits of flaking red metal filled the roofless trunk, a sapling grew up through the space where the engine had been, wild grape vines buried the radiator, the only thing left under the hood — had there been a hood — and the tires had long since rotted down to collapsed rims. The back seat had been completely removed and large holes had been excavated in most of the front seat. The steering wheel and dashboard were in reasonably good shape although not one piece of glass had escaped destruction.

"Watch where you're walking, squirt." Ray grabbed the back of his brother's tee-shirt and hauled him to his side. "There's enough busted glass and metal around here to slice and dice and make julienne fries." He sighed and kicked at a door

Artwork by Richard Powers

panel. "Not enough to make a car though. Come on, Dad. We better get that buffet unloaded before Mom blows. Dad?" He stared at his father who was staring at the car. "Dad?"

Nigel reached out and gently ran his fingers along the warm metal of the roof. "Boys, do you know what this is?"

"Yeah, it's industrial waste."

"No. It's a 1966 Ford Galaxy, seven liter. It was a special upgrade on the regular Galaxy and there weren't that many sold. I had one just like it. It was my first car. Christ, this could *be* that car."

"Language, Dad."

"What? Oh, right, sorry." He shook himself, pushing away the memories that had crowed around. "Come on, we'd better get that buffet unloaded." At the edge of the trees, he stopped and looked back, murmuring again. "It could be that car."

"Don't see what you're getting so excited about. It doesn't look like it was that great a car."

"Not great?" Nigel turned to face his sons. "The Ford Galaxy seven liter was a 428 cubic inch, V-8 automatic, four speed, dual exhaust ..." His expression softened as he looked into the past. "She had heavy duty suspension and held the road like she was holding her one true love. She handled like a charm, and fast ... I'm telling you, boys, there's nothing like the expression of shock on a guy's face when your family sedan peels away from his flashy muscle car."

Ray looked shocked. "You drag raced? My dad? The guy who's never even got a speeding ticket?"

"Not exactly drag race, no." Nigel cleared his throat. While he didn't want to set a bad example, neither did he want his teenage son to think of him as stuffy and old; not when he'd been suddenly reminded of how it felt to be young. "I bought her from my uncle — your great-uncle — Frank. Paid him two hundred and fifty dollars for her and even in 1971 that wasn't a lot of money. He cut me a deal because he loved the car himself."

"You couldn't get a good set of hubcaps for two hundred and fifty bucks today," Ray pointed out, slapping at a bug.

"Well, she didn't come with hubcaps but boy did she have heart. I loved that car. We *all* loved that car because I was the only one in my gang of friends with wheels. We called her the Jelly-roll."

"The what?"

Even Peter stopped trying to shinny up the uncooperative trunk of a beech tree and turned to stare at his father, repeating, "Jelly-roll?"

"Sure." Nigel smiled a little self-consciously. "My nickname when I was a kid, well, right up until I moved away to university — was Jelly."

"Dad." Ray frowned. "Nigel and jelly don't rhyme."

"It's a derivative, son. Ni-gel. Jel-ly." He shook his head as the boys exchanged expressions of identical disbelief. "Never mind." Twisting protesting muscles for one final look at the wreck, he sighed. "My buddies and I cruised all over town in that car, windows down, radio up. We even had a set of fuzzy dice; red ones 'cause the car was white. Wimbledon white."

"That's a tennis tournament."

"No, no, it's the shade of white that Ford did their cars in in '66. We thought it was *very* classy, *very* hip." He could feel the car behind them as they headed back to the house; and the buffet; and the unpacking; and the starting over somewhere new. "I haven't thought of the old Jelly-roll in years."

While Peter ran on ahead, Ray patted his father on the shoulder. "Yeah well, Dad, do me a favor, would you? Never tell that story around any of my friends. It is so majorly uncool."

"Uncool?"

"Sure. I mean, a four-door sedan? Jelly-roll? Fuzzy dice?"

"And what would you consider to be cool?"

"A Firebird." Ray's hands sketched a long, low silhouette in the air. "Royal blue. I'd call it something like Road Warrior or Maverick Machine. And no fuzzy dice."

"Cost you more than two hundred and fifty bucks ..."

"Yeah. Well, actually, I was meaning to talk to you about that."

Nigel punched his son lightly on the arm. "Should've thought of that before you called my Jelly-roll uncool."

"Dad!"

"You still have four months to save. Talk to me on your birthday." He waggled his eyebrows as they emerged out onto the lawn. "Maybe I'll have forgiven the insult by then."

"Dad!"

"Where's your mother?"

Ray glanced up from his second bowl of cereal and nodded towards the front of the house. "Office. One of her papers called with a problem."

Nigel poured himself a cup of coffee and glared down the hall. "I thought she was supposed to be on vacation until the middle of July?"

"Yeah, well, I guess it's an emergency. Something about a hard drive eating a graphics program she'd installed and they need it right away."

"Still. You'd think the world could manage without her for more than two lousy days."

Ray shrugged and swallowed.

"When I say I'm taking two weeks off," Nigel said, dropping into a chair, "I don't go into the office until my vacation is over."

"Yeah, well, Mom's essential." Grabbing his empty bowl, Ray pushed away from the table. "Most of these corporate guys couldn't even underline without her."

"Mom's essential. Right." Listening to the hollow boom of his son pounding up the stairs, Nigel scowled into his coffee and tried very hard not to grind his teeth.

"Hey sweetie, what're you doing out here?" Picking a careful path between the brambles, Lynn made her way to her husband's side and tucked herself under his left arm. She felt rather than heard him sigh.

"I was just having a little think about the good old days," he admitted.

"The good old days?"

"Yeah, you know. Before S.A.T.s and job searches and mortgages and diapers and braces and little league."

She snaked an arm around his waist and tucked her thumb through a belt loop. "Before me?"

He turned to look at her then. He hadn't met her until after university. Long after the Jelly-roll had been sold. "Never before you," he said, knowing she'd believe the lie.

"Definitely before poison ivy."

"Poison ivy?"

"Uh huh. Peter found a patch of it out behind the garage."

"How bad is he?"

"Well ..." Pivoting on one foot she turned him around and began to herd him from the clearing. "... you can take him to Dr. Patton's after you've dropped Doris off at her ball game."

Pushing through the screen of bushes meant single file. While Lynn went on ahead, Nigel shot one last glance back over his shoulder at the Galaxy.

Before poison ivy, before ball games ...

Time is relative. Vacation time, doubly so. Nigel pulled into the driveway, turned

off the motor, and let his head fall forward onto the steering wheel. The drive from country home to city job took fifty minutes on traffic-free secondary highways for most of the trip. Before they'd moved it had taken thirty — although that half hour stood more in theory than fact. He'd once spent ninety minutes moving two kilometers. Fifty minutes of clear driving was fair exchange. The problem wasn't the drive. The problem was the destination.

He'd returned to a job that hadn't changed in the week he'd been away. The same memos were still stuck to the bulletin board, his boss was still having the same problems with the tenants in the three-story building she owned downtown, supply and distribution still weren't talking to each other. And nothing would change now he was back.

Exhaling noisily, he climbed out of the car and stretched, leaving his briefcase lying on the front seat. His job and his car were much alike, dependable and dull. He was halfway to the clearing before he realized he'd decided to go look at the wreck.

As nobody bounded out to meet me. I guess they can wait a few more minutes for the pleasure of my company.

Wading through the knee-high grass to the driver's side, he wrapped his fingers around the handle and it almost felt as though the warm chrome conformed to the contours of his palm. To his surprise the mechanism depressed under his thumb. He jerked his arm back to break the rust. Screaming like a tormented soul, the door swung open.

The actual place where the driver would rest butt and back had barely been touched although the rest of the front seat had been extensively scavenged for nesting material. He could get in. Sit down. Remember.

After the graduation ceremonies were over, practically the entire senior class had ended up at a party out in the suburbs. For the last time as a cohesive group, they'd danced, drank, and necked. Couch rugby, they'd called it then, although most of them had never seen a rugger game. The party had finally broken up, just before dawn, and as one of the few remaining with a car, Nigel had packed the old Jelly-roll for the trip back into town. Four guys were shoehorned into the back seat, three girls were tucked in on their laps, and Mitchel Hughes sprawled across the stack, feet out one window, head resting on the other. Ron Allen sat on the front seat, a girl supported in each arm. As Nigel remembered, Ron never had much luck with girls. With no room left in the car, Jim Elliot folded his lanky, six foot one frame into the trunk. The girls were all in long gowns, the boys were in suits, none of them were exactly sober.

Nigel had eased the Jelly-roll, straining under the weight but gallantly responding, away from the curb and out onto the empty streets. At the first stoplight, Jim climbed out of the trunk, over the roof, and slid down the windshield to rest, legs akimbo, grinning stupidly, on the hood. In the interest of safety, Ron had helped him thread the happy wanderer through the back window on top of Mitchel. Mitchel protested but not as loudly as the four guys on the bottom of the pile who'd suggested that they put Jim back into the trunk and, this time, latch it.

The sun was up by the time everyone had been safely dropped off and his father had found him, three hours later, sound asleep on the front seat of his car.

"Those were the days," he said quietly to his reflection in the rearview mirror. "People had to get home so we did it, me and the Jelly-roll. We didn't worry about it, about the doing or the consequences, we just took them home." A simpler time or a simpler sense of responsibility? Probably both.

He hadn't thought about Mitchel, or Ron, or Jim for years. His parents had moved just after he'd left town for university and that had pretty much shattered all remaining ties. "Wonder what they're doing now? Wonder if it's as basically senseless as what I'm doing now." He raised a hand to brush sweat-damp hair back off his forehead, the reflection making it appear thicker and darker than it had in years. The tiny lines around his eyes had all but disappeared. The longer he looked, the more he liked what he saw.

"Hey, Dad, whatcha doin'?"

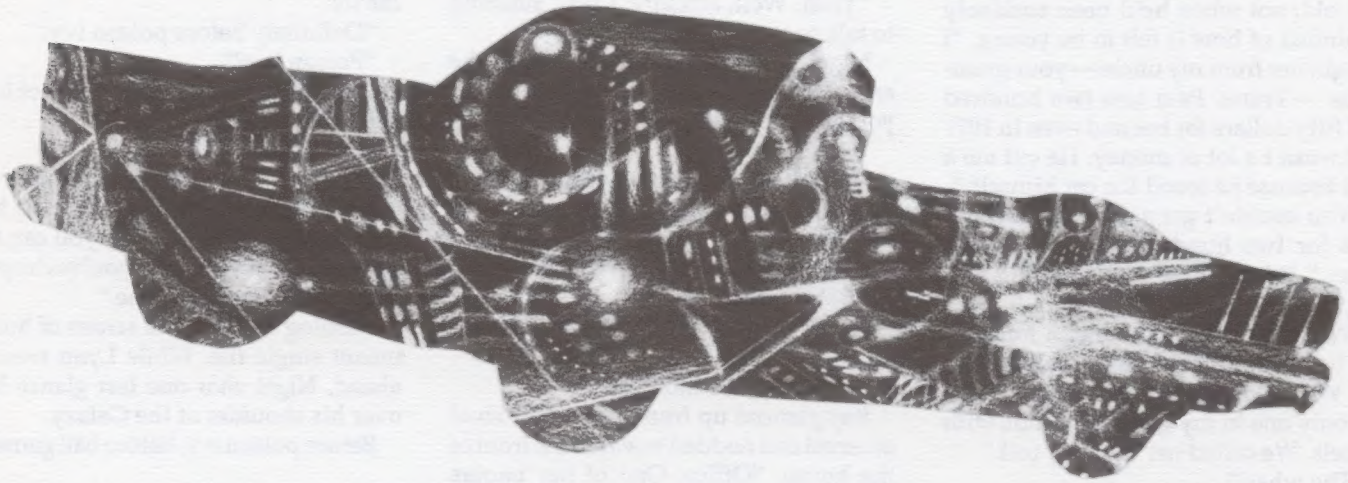
When he turned, Nigel was astonished to find his oldest leaning on the car's open door. The question had seemed to come from much further away.

"We saw you drive in but then you never came into the house. How come?"

He shook off the warm layer of memory. "Because I came down here instead."

"Oh." Ray squinted into the car, scratching at an insect bite. "What're you lookin' at?"

Nigel laughed self-consciously and slid out from behind the steering wheel. "Just



my reflection in the rearview mirror," he said. *Thicker. Darker. Wrinkle free.*

Leaning around his father, Ray frowned. "But Dad, there's no mirror in the frame."

"No mirror?" Confused, Nigel looked into the car at the rusted, rectangle of metal. Just for a second, his reflection, stripped of the marks that three kids, a mortgage, and a dead-end job had left, looked back. "No mirror ..." Then it was gone.

"Come on, Dad. I think you've had a hard day and too much sun."

"Too much sun ..." Maybe that was it. The nose of the car pointed west. He'd been staring into the sun ...

"Or maybe you're losing your marbles, getting old."

"I am not getting old." The force of the protest pushed Ray back a step and he stood, staring at his father in astonishment.

"I am not getting old," Nigel repeated. He brushed at his face. It felt as though there were cobwebs hanging from his lashes.

"I've been thinking about restoring that old Galaxy." Nigel capped the salad dressing and set the bottle down on the table. "What do you think?"

"Me?" Lynn frowned. "Is it worth it?"

"Depends on how you measure worth, doesn't it?"

She turned to stare at him, puzzled by his tone. "I wasn't criticizing, Nigel. I was just wondering."

He refused to be mollified. "Well, it's worth it to me."

"Then do it, by all means. I've always said you needed a hobby."

"Little boys and old men have hobbies," Nigel snapped.

Lynn surrendered. Obviously, she couldn't say anything right.

He remembered the summer trips to the drive-in and tentative kisses that became the first feel of someone else's tongue caressing the inside of his mouth. Sweaters were best although the middle buttons on blouses could be undone enough to allow access to a questing hand while still maintaining appearances. Front closing bras were a godsend. In a car the size of the Galaxy, the steering wheel left plenty of room for serious maneuvers while the rearview mirror allowed a voyeur's eye view of Mitchel's or Jim's or Ron's successes.

He didn't remember many movies. Leaning his head back against the seat, he breathed deeply, savoring the smell of sweetly scented flesh and the distinct metal and vinyl and young male odor of the old Jelly-roll. If he stretched his arm out, he could almost feel the rounded shoulder of Marianne Lewis, soft and warm and yielding under his hand.

"But Mom, he's not actually doing anything to it. He hasn't even cut down that tree that's poking up."

"He got the book ..."

"Yeah, but he isn't using it. When he gets down there he gets all stupid." Ray handed her another stack of paper. "I mean, geez Mom, Jelly-roll?"

Lynn refilled the feed on the laser printer. "The original Jelly-roll was very important to your father," she said, as the first page rolled through. "And men of your father's age very often attempt to hold onto a piece of the past."

"I wish he'd act his age," Ray muttered.

"Raymond, that's no way to talk about your father."

"Yeah, well he's not acting much like my father. If you'd just go out there and see what he's like around that stupid car ..."

"Oh no, you're not getting me back out there. I've quite enough to do handling the wildlife that Peter brings home." She squinted at the printout, sighed, and pulled the keyboard down onto her lap. "Now, please go away; the Post's graphics have just screwed up again and I have lots of work to do."

"But Mom ..."

"Not now Ray. We'll talk about this later, okay? Okay?"

"Yeah. Okay."

The streets had to be almost empty of traffic, that was part of what made the game so cool.

"That one!" Mitchel yelled. "Follow that one. The blue two-door."

With Jim hanging over the seat between them — guys didn't ride three in the front — he pulled out of the parking lot and tucked the Jelly-roll exactly three lengths behind the designated leader. When the blue car turned, he turned. When the blue car slowed, he slowed. Maintaining the distance was a crucial aspect of the game.

"Has he figured it out yet?" Jim hitched his elbows behind the headrests and flattened himself against the back of the seat.

"I don't think so."

The blue car sped up suddenly at the traffic circle. They'd been spotted.

"This is great!" Mitchel carolled as they squealed around the long outside curve.

It was great. He put his foot down and ... nearly shoved it right through the rotten bottom of the car. A jagged metal point etched a line between sneaker top and jeans and the pain jerked him back to the front seat of a wreck, abandoned and nearly overgrown with bush.

Nigel swallowed and ran the tip of his tongue over dry lips. He'd been there. With Jim and Mitchel. He'd felt the Jelly-roll respond. Turn when he said turn. Go when he said go. Stop when he said stop. His heart was pounding so hard that it drowned out the sound of the birds and the insects and left him isolated in the car.

He almost broke his ankle in the panicked scramble out into the sunlight and somehow managed not to look back as he hobbled as fast as he was able toward the house.

He hadn't realized that the wreck could be seen from the road. Rounding the corner at the top of the hill, at just the right angle, and just for an instant, he could see it every evening as he came home from work.

On the fourth day, he went back to the clearing.

"Doris, you think Dad's been acting weird lately?"

"He's always acted weird. Throw me some grounders."

"No, I mean really weird." Ray skimmed the ball in the general direction of his sister, not really paying attention as she dove for it, rolled, and whipped it back. "Like he goes down to that wreck every night after work and he's there almost all weekend. I mean, last Saturday afternoon he sat there for two hours in the rain."

"So he's restoring it. Let me have one on the other side."

"There's nothing to restore. The best thing you could make out of that heap of junk is a half a box of rusty razor blades." He had to jump to catch her return throw. "Most catchers are not seven foot tall," he pointed out. "Anyway, I'm worried about Dad."

"Dad's fine."

"I don't think so ..."

"Just throw the ball!"

"That kind of an obsession isn't natural!"

"Are you going to throw the ball or am I going to come down there and pound you?"

He threw the ball. Was he the only one who felt that something was wrong? Peter was too young, but at thirteen Doris should be nearly sentient. *'Course she's not interested in anything that isn't wearing a baseball uniform. Not the best person to talk to about obsession.*

Maybe it was the heat. He'd read somewhere that people did crazy things in the summer because of the heat.

He wanted to believe it was the heat. But he didn't.

He loved the smell of the wax as he rubbed it into the sun-warmed paint. Loved the way his reflection rose up through the streaks and the smudges until it grinned up at him from a mirror perfect finish. Other guys might only concern themselves with what went on under the hood but he took care of his car.

"Mom, he was out there all afternoon, rubbing wax into the one spot on the roof that isn't all hacked to ratshit."

"Language," Lynn cautioned. Ray ignored her. "Mom, he called me Jim. Said it looked like I was finally getting some muscle to match what I had between my ears. Mom, he didn't know it was me until I shook him."

Lynn sat back on her heels, trowel dangling from one hand. "He called you Jim?"

"Yes!"

"Maybe I'd better talk to him ..."

"That's what I've been saying all along!"

She stood and dusted bits of grass and dirt off her knees. "Is he down there now?"

"No. He's in the room behind the kitchen. Going through that old trunk of his."

"Well, at least I don't have to go get my machete." When Ray refused to smile, she reached up and touched his cheek with some concern. "This is really bothering you, isn't it?"

He jerked his head away from her fingers. "It's just that car is all he ever thinks about anymore. And nobody seems to think that's strange but me!"

"Ray, I think you're overreacting ..."

"Just talk to him, Mom. Please."

She handed him the trowel. "Don't worry, I'm on my way."

Fingers twisting the wooden handle, he watched her walk to the house. He knew she didn't really think there was anything wrong. Behind him, even through the insulating distance of lawn and field and bush, he could feel the car waiting.

"You haven't opened that trunk in years, sweetie. Are you looking for something?"

Nigel continued to rummage in the depths of the rusty blue trunk. "Yes," he said shortly.

Lips pursed, Lynn peered over his shoulder, one hand resting lightly on the curve of his back. "Can we talk for a minute?"

"About what?"

"Oh, your son. That car ..."

Nigel straightened. "What about the car?"

"Well, Ray seems to think you're spending too much time with it." She perched on the edge of an old wooden table they'd inherited with the house. "You know how it is at fifteen, not quite a boy, not quite a man ..."

Fifteen. Almost sixteen. In mere months he'd have his license then Uncle Frank had promised. Promised he'd sell him the car.

"... and I think he might be jealous. It hasn't been easy for him moving out here, away from his friends. Oh, I know Jeff was out for three days last week and he rides his bike into the rec center most days, but until school starts he's pretty much on his own. I don't know, maybe you should spend more time with him. What do you think?"

Nigel blinked. "Spend more time with who?"

"Raymond. Your son."

His son? He frowned. Son ... "He'll be okay." Maybe they were under all those old racing magazines. He bent back into the trunk.

Lynn frowned. It wasn't like Nigel to brush off one of the kids' concerns like that. Maybe he was a little too involved in that old wreck. Still, a lot of men developed eccentricities as forty approached. *I suppose I should be glad it's not another woman ...*

"Found them." String clutched tightly in his hand, Nigel rose.

"Fuzzy dice?" She stared at the faded pinky-red ornaments, not really fuzzy or very dice-shaped anymore. A number of their black felt dots had come unglued and, under the matted plush, they were far from square. "That's what you were looking for?"

He nodded and headed for the door. "Gonna put them in the car. Don't know why I took them out."

"Nigel!" Although he had to have heard, he continued to head straight for the clearing. Lower lip caught between her teeth, Lynn watched him until he disappeared into the bush, all at once less than certain that everything was all right.

"Mom, didn't Dad go to work this morning?"

Lynn paused at the door to her office, coffee cup raised halfway to her mouth. "As far as I know he did. Why?"

"Well, 'cause his car's still in the driveway." Peter leaned forward until his nose indented the screen "Don't see Dad, though."

She took a step back toward the kitchen. "Is my car there?"

"Uh huh." Peter turned and headed for the fridge. "He's probably down at that dumb ol' jelly car."

"You're probably right. Ray ...?"

Ray looked up from his cereal. "You want me to go get him?"

"Please." The expression on his face anchored her where she stood. "No, never mind. He's already late for work. You might as well finish your breakfast."

"It's okay." He pushed the bowl aside. "I'm not real hungry." He paused at the door and turned, looking younger and more vulnerable than she could remember seeing him look in years. "What if he doesn't want to come?"

"Don't be silly, of course he'll come." Her laugh sounded more hollow than reassuring. "Just tell him I want to talk to him. That it's important."

He didn't seem convinced but he nodded and said, "I'll tell him."

From her office window, Lynn watched him cross the yard and disappear into the bush, like his father had the day before.

"Now is that the finishing touch or what?" Jim leaned over the front seat, stretched out a long arm, and flicked at the dice with one finger. "Definitely very cool."

"Outa sight," Mitchel agreed.

Nigel closed the driver's door then reached up to brush his hand over the plush. "I got red because the car's white."

"You're one classy hombre, Jelly." Jim pulled on a pair of mirrored sunglasses. "So are we out of here or what?"

"It's time," Mitchel declared. "Come on, Jelly. Let's hit the road."

Stomach in knots and wishing he hadn't eaten even as little as he had, Ray pushed through the brush toward the clearing. Although there wasn't a cloud in the sky, the world felt as though it were waiting

for a storm, trembling on the edge of thunder and lightning and wind and hail.

"Mom wants to talk to him, she should go get him herself."

He hated the way his father was around the wreck. He didn't want to go near him. But he didn't want to leave him there either.

"Heck, I'm bigger than he is. If he doesn't want to come, I'll drag him."

Just behind the last barricade of brambles, he paused. Every leaf, every twig, every blade of grass stood out in sharp relief. He could hear his own heart slamming up against his ribs but that was all. No birds. No insects. It was so quiet, he could almost hear the trickle of sweat running down his back.

Why isn't there a path? There should be a path by now. As he stepped out into the clearing, a trick of the early morning sun made the car seem almost whole. Eyes watering, he squinted, tripped, and flung out both hands to stop himself from falling. They smacked against the hood with a metallic boom.

But this thing doesn't have a hood ... Sprawled half over the car, Ray twisted and found himself staring through the windshield at his father.

"Dad?"

Nigel frowned. "Did you guys hear something?"

Jim lifted his sunglasses. He and Mitchel exchanged a long look. "No," he said. "We didn't hear anything."

"I'm sure I heard something ..."

Mitchel shrugged. "Okay. Heard what?"

What had he heard? It was important. He knew it was important. "I heard ... I heard someone calling for their father."

"Nothin' to do with you, Jelly." Jim's hand closed on his shoulder. "Now can we blow this popsicle joint?"

"No ... I ... I have to ..."

"All you have to do is get in the old Jelly-roll and hit the road." Mitchel bounced against the seat, setting the shocks gently rocking. "You don't have a care in the world, Jelly, old bean. Not a care in the world."

"Not a care ..."

"That's right." Jim hooked his elbows behind the headrests. "So crank her up and let's go man go!"

Nigel glanced up at the rearview mirror. His reflection grinned down at him.

Something wasn't right ... His fingers closed around the key.

"DAD!"

Dad. Nigel shook his head. He was Dad. "Ray?"

The engine turned over.

Ray grabbed for the sapling and just barely managed to keep from pitching over the side of the wreck and into the rusted remains of the engine compartment. With trembling fingers he reached out and stroked the air where the windshield should have been. His ears were ringing and over the early morning sounds of birds and insects, he thought he heard his father scream his name.

"D ... Dad?"

Pushing himself erect, he fought to breathe. There wasn't a hood. There wasn't a window. He hadn't seen his father in the car.

Hadn't seen his father. Hadn't. He swallowed hard and staggered back a step. The car had been white. The pitted paint was now blue.

Royal blue. Its shape, warped only a little by time and neglect, was long and low.

I'd call it something like Road Warrior or Maverick Machine. And no fuzzy dice.

Blood roaring in his ears, he turned and ran for the house.

"Honey, you'll never guess what I just found out in the woods."

Christine Naylor smiled fondly at her husband. "You're right. I'll never guess. What did you find?"

"It's a 1973 Dodge Dart." He dropped to his knees beside her lawn chair. "Some moron just left it there."

"Well, I'm glad that a man with a brand new mortgage who's about to be a brand new father can find such joy in a wreck in the woods."

He pushed his cheek up against the curve of her belly. "You don't understand, Chris. A 1973 Dodge Dart — my first car was a 1973 Dart.

"I loved that car."

Tanya Huff says that after 13 years in downtown Toronto she recently moved to just right of the middle of nowhere. Although she swore that writing full-time would not lead to a "thickening of the spine" she recently turned in her longest book by 200 pages. **BLOOD PACT**, the 4th and last novel (she says) in her Vicky/Henry/Celluci series will be released in November of this year.

Richard Powers has been a prolific SF cover artist since the 1940s. His surrealistic style helped create a characteristic "look" for early SF paperback covers. In addition to his commercial work, he has an established reputation as a fine artist, being known for his seascapes as well as his surrealistic works. He was the Artist Guest of Honor at the 1991 WorldCon in Chicago.

Dream Catcher

Laura J. Underwood

Artwork by Ray Williams

The dream catcher sat in the center of old Corwyn's worktable, draped in black velvet. Actually, it wasn't a dream catcher yet, for Princess Alana had taken a peek. Just a huge globe of glass resting under the cover. Corwyn, the Court Wizard, assured the young princess that it would be a dream catcher when he was through. Once his spell was in place, the globe would capture the dream of anyone who slept near it. The dream catcher would hold that dream and replay it over and over so the dreamer might enjoy that dream while awake.

Corwyn told her all about this marvel as he worked. He was making it as a surprise gift to honor the birthday of her father, King Kelvar of Arunane. The old wizard had no fear of Alana revealing this secret to her father. Corwyn often divulged his private works to Alana, for he knew she could not reveal his secrets to anyone else.

Alana had been born a mute.

Oh, she was not deaf, and far from a fool. In fact, her nurses often said she was quite a clever girl, for she was now learning to write and seemed to know how to read. She simply could not speak.

They had tried very hard to teach her to speak. Experts of all sorts came and examined Alana, hoping to find a cure that would earn them a great fortune from the king. Not one of them could find anything wrong with the pretty child. They couldn't even say it was a family trait, for the three brothers and two sisters born before Alana were all quite vocal with their opinions at an early age.

Alana's late mother, Queen Talia, saw no reason to fret. "She'll speak when she wants to," the queen would say, and though through the first seven years of life Alana showed no inclination in that direction, Queen Talia never ceased to love her quiet child. Alana's father would hold her close even when he was busy with affairs of the state, and he called her his little mouse. The nurses all declared a quiet child was a gift from the gods, for Alana never raised a fuss and always seemed a happy child.

That was, of course, before Queen Talia met her tragic death at old Corwyn's hands.

Everyone in the kingdom of Arunane had mourned Queen Talia when the fall down the stairs broke her neck. "Must have slipped," they all said. "How terrible! She was so well loved, and no one would dream of doing her any harm. So sad she was alone that day. So sad the little princess was the first one to find her."

The castle of Arunane was huge, possessing many towers, gardens, courtyards and wings, may of which were deserted from time to time. The royal residence was almost a city unto itself with hundreds of servants to attend the royal household. Alana often imagined that if every servant stood in a single line, holding hands, the last of them would simply disappear over the horizon.

Quite to the contrary of popular belief, the queen was not alone when she died. Corwyn was there — as was Alana, though her presence had not been detected by the wizard. She had been playing under the stairs that afternoon. Most children would have been making enough noise to let their locations be known for many leagues. Alana liked playing under the stairs. A quiet place for a quiet child.

The voices were what first alerted Alana that something was amiss. She grew still, listening as her mother called Corwyn a fool.

"I don't know where you could have gotten such an idea," Queen Talia protested.

"But your highness — my dear Talia," Corwyn said. "I have long loved you from afar, and I know I have seen that same love light filling your blue eyes when you look at me."

Alana slowly crept out of hiding, staying in the shadows as she looked up. She could see her mother near the curved railing just at the head of the stairs. The little girl could also see Corwyn's face growing red with rage and indignation as her mother laughed at him.

"You are mistaken," the queen said, and her voice took on a more serious note. "How could you possibly believe that I could love you? That is not to say I cannot see the handsome face and figure beneath those billowy robes and that bushy beard. I love Kelvar as I always have, and I love all my darling children as well. I will not betray them to indulge

Artwork by Ray Williams

the whims of a love-besotted wizard who seems to have forgotten his place."

Apparently, those words had gone to Corwyn's heart like a dagger, for he cried out in anger, insulting the queen, and struck at her with his fist. Queen Talia saw the blow coming and by instinct, she stepped back to avoid it. Alas, her foot snagged the train of her long velvet skirt and sent her pitching down the stairs.

Alana opened her mouth in a scream, but the only sound to be heard was the scream that issued from Queen Talia's lungs. Corwyn was rushing down the stairs, chasing the fall of the queen as though he thought he could save her. His face bore a horrible mask of panic. Fear drove Alana back into her hiding place just as Queen Talia hit the floor. What could a small, mute child possibly do to stop a mighty wizard? She listened as Corwyn called the queen's name over and over in vain. Pitiful moans came from his throat before she heard the patter of his soft-soled boots on the polished marble when at last he fled. Only when the quiet returned did Alana dare to slip out of hiding and run for help.

Even that took great effort on her part. She could not speak, could not say what had occurred. She could only tug the old captain's tunic hem and frantically point up the hall, looking at him with a face washed by tears. He eventually figured that something was amiss when she refused to leave, so he allowed her to lead him into the back halls where he found the queen and sounded the alarm.

At once, a crowd gathered, her father included. He held her briefly, telling her everything would be all right and demanding to know why the queen's personal guard had left her unattended. In the sea of faces, Alana saw Corwyn. He too was shedding tears of grief.

From that moment, she hated him, wanted him punished. But how could she realize that vengeance? How could she even tell them what really occurred when she was unable to speak?

The queen was buried with ceremony. The entire kingdom of Arunane cried at her funeral. Through tears, Alana watched as the body of her mother, dressed in her finest gown and richly bejeweled, was placed in a sarcophagus among those containing the corpses of countless royal ancestors. The stone was placed and magically sealed and marked with an ornate metal plaque by Corwyn himself.

Afterwards, Alana was no less pampered and loved than before, but she certainly became a quieter child than ever. She took to spending time around Corwyn's tower, playing in his garden and his halls. At first, he acted annoyed, but she was never fussy. Never got in his way, just smiled when he spoke to her at all. Eventually, he came to talk to her often, for he knew what he said to her would never be repeated. He soon began playing the role of an indulgent grandparent to the princess. The old wizard would entertain her with feats of magic, letting her watch even his more secretive spells. She became his trusted confidante, always smiling brightly at him. She didn't want him to know that, in her heart, she loathed him for what he had done, loathed him for stealing her mother's life. The only reason she came was in hopes of finding some means to enact her revenge.

Now, at sixteen summers, she had grown quite fair of face with her auburn locks drawn back in long, twin braids. Her eyes were blue, like her mother's. In fact, there were those who said Alana looked very much like the late queen. Even Corwyn mentioned it once or twice, and she would see the flush that highlighted his cheeks as though some memory burned him from within.

Alana leaned on the edge of the worn worktable and ran a finger over the whorl of the wood. Corwyn had just finished instructing a carpenter as to the exact dimensions and description of the stand. Oak, polished and stained, for it needed to be of a sturdy wood to protect and support the fragile globe. He laid out a pattern inscribed on parchment, an interlocking braided knot. Quartermoons over the top and base. Quite intricate and pretty, Alana thought as she stared at the covered orb.

Today, Corwyn was ready to ensorcell his globe with the dream catcher spell. He sent Alana to a protected distance outside his circle of power, and used a levitation spell to suspend the globe over the center. "It may get a little bright," he added, "so be prepared to cover your eyes, mouse."

Mouse—her father still called her that, and Corwyn had claimed the right to indulge in that nickname as well. She let a smile flicker across her lips before settling into a corner on a stool.

Corwyn sealed his circle with the appropriate words of power, burning of incense and and extravagant gestures. He then focused his attention on the globe. Carefully, he wove his spell with such perfect artistry, Alana couldn't resist allowing a hint of admiration to creep through her dislike. Soon, a bright mist of everchanging colors swirled within the globe; red to blue, yellow to green, from amber to lavender and on in a lively kaleidoscope. Alana certainly held her breath, though she saw no reason to cover her eyes. All at once, the delightful colors faded, leaving a mere hint of mist within the dream catcher globe.

"Success!" Corwyn said as he swept away his circle of power and gently levitated the sphere back to its place on the worktable. Alana practically raced him over to the spot, eager to see what his magic had wrought. But as she stared into the dream catcher, she saw nothing more than mist.

"Sorry, dear mouse," Corwyn said as she quizzically peered over the globe at him. "There's nothing to be seen as of yet. I'll test it tonight, and tomorrow, you shall be the first to see what dream it has captured."

Disappointment must have marred her face, for Corwyn chuckled and yawned. "Don't be sad, mouse. My, but magic can be tiring on an old man. Indulge me, child, and leave me now. I think I shall take a little nap."

Alana bit her lip and fought to keep from furrowing her brow. Instead, she nodded and curtsied in the polite manner she had been taught by her nurses. Smiling as sweetly as she could muster, she left Corwyn's tower for her own quarters.

The rest of the day seemed to drag at such a leaden pace, and Alana was quieter than ever at supper. Her head was filled only with thoughts of Corwyn's dream catcher, wondering if it would really work. Oh, how she hoped so. Her closest siblings teased her for her vacant stare, and even her father and nurses wondered if she was ill. She ignored them all, eventually retiring to her rooms and her bed to fret away the night. Sleep was elusive, though when she did sink under the blanket of slumber, her own dreams were a restless concoction of unrelated events.

When Alana arose with the dawn, her

mind was a jumble of *what if*s and *why not*s. She dearly wanted the dream catcher to work — wanted desperately to know that it worked. From the first time Corwyn mentioned the project while puttering around his workroom, Alana had prayed to the gods he would build the thing. She had never quite given up hope that some day she would find a way to tell her father what really happened to her mother. Her writing lessons, she had hoped, would provide her with a means, and it had taken her years to convince her nurses that someone should teach her this art. But the process was slow, her script was not neat, and sometimes, though she did try, she found it difficult to put those tragic words on paper.

By the time she had dressed and had breakfast, the sun had risen well over the garden trees and castle walls. She practically ran all the way up Corwyn's stairs, pausing at the top to catch her breath before rapping on the wooden door.

There was a shuffle behind the door, a muffled curse and the flap of cloth. The bolt slid back and the door was opened a crack. Brown eyes peered at her from under a mat of disheveled locks. Corwyn squinted, then registered dismay when Alana smiled. He shook his head.

Artwork by Ray Williams

"Not today, child. I can't see you today."

She didn't bother to hide the disappointment, making a large circle with her hands. He had to let her in! Had to let her see!

"Ah, yes, the dream catcher," he said and once more shook his head. "You can come see it tomorrow, dear mouse. It caught nothing of importance last night — nothing you would want to see. Come back tomorrow, and I'll show you a pretty dream, I promise."

The door closed rather firmly in Alana's face, and at first, she was so angry, all she could so was clench her fists and stamp an impatient foot on the floor. She wanted so much to scream at him, but what could she do? A sigh of bitter frustration burst from her lungs. Tomorrow, then. She slipped away and left the tower at a dirgelike pace.

But tomorrow came, and Corwyn once more barred her at his door. "Upset stomach all night," he claimed. "I wasn't able to sleep a wink. Must have been a bad bit of beef. No dream today — come back tomorrow."

Again and again she climbed the stairs to his tower. Each time, he had some thin excuse for not letting her see. Each day, his face grew more haggard and worn. Circles waxed deep and dark under his eyes.

She tried coming at different times of the day, but always with the same results. The days crept into a week, then two and her frustration increased with the passage of time. The time for her father's birthday celebration grew near, and still Corwyn refused to let Alana into his workroom. She heard servants, her own nurses among them, whisper that the old wizard had gone mad. He was often seen wandering the halls, muttering and ranting about nightmares and curses.

Alana was growing desperate. What could have been the matter? Had the dream catcher failed? She wanted so much to see for herself. She prayed that it would work, for it was now her sole desire to have the dream catcher capture a dream she often had — her mother's death. The dream catcher was her last hope for revealing Corwyn's guilt for all to see.

Desperation drove her to act on the final night before the birthday celebration. She had learned that the woodcrafter was about to deliver the stand to Corwyn's rooms late that night. Two of

his apprentices trudged up the stairs on the master carpenter's heels, hauling the heavy stand between them. No one seemed to notice the silent girl who crept along in their wake, her finery and colors traded for a simple shirt, tunic and split skirt of black. Alana followed them to Corwyn's chambers. He unbarred his door for the workmen and was forced to clear the way as they jostled through with the stand. Alana heard him begging them to be careful when they came close to upsetting his worktable. With all their attention drawn away from the door, Alana found it a simple task to enter the room and find a corner inside a curtained niche. She left a small gap to allow her to view the room, concealing herself there in the shadows to watch and wait.

Corwyn hustled the men from his chambers and bolted the door before turning back to view the wooden stand. He looked so thin and pale, and fretful lines ran deep across his face. He sighed, shaking his head.

"Such beautiful work too," he said with a hint of remorse. "And all for naught if I cannot find a way to fix matters this night." Wearily, he gestured toward the velvet-shrouded sphere. His spell chant caused the orb to rise and float across the room.

Gently, he settled the globe into the stand. A perfect fit, it seemed, as he fussed with the cover. His hands rested lightly on the soft material, stroking the velvet like it was a woman's hair.

"Please," he whispered. "Just for tonight. Let my dreams be wondrous to behold."

He ran his fingers across the velvet one last time and slowly paced over to the next room which Alana knew housed his bed. One last look passed over his shoulder before he gestured to put out the torches and lanterns. Darkness fell over the room, save the flicker of candlelight from the bedchamber, and that too was soon extinguished.

Alana counted rounds and rounds of numbers in her head, wanting to be certain that all was still. From the wizard's bedchamber came the soft, shallow whisper of his breathing. Ever alert, she stepped out of her hiding place and glided quietly across the floor as though she were little more than a shadow. Her fingers trembled as she seized the edge of the cloth and drew it aside.

A pale, blue-white glow convolved within the sphere, looking like a cloudy-dressed summer sky. Something moved in its midst, a pale form beating feathered wings, growing more solid as it rose. A flying horse, as bright as a pearl, flew out of a cloud and pranced across the dream sky now filled with a rainbow's hue. Alana gasped. Oh, so beautiful! For moments, she was captivated by the wonderful sight. She watched the creature flitter about inside the sphere, longing to touch it with her hands. How sad to think it was only a dream ...

The edges of the sphere took on a darker hue, and the flying horse fled what looked

Artwork by Ray Williams

like a terrible black storm on the rise. Lightning stretched fingers across the rolling clouds that turned black, and reached out to strike a turret that rose under Alana's gaze. She flinched to realize the turret was the one outside this very tower.

The view seemed to shift now, as though the watcher were plunging from the sky, through a window and into a hall where a graceful figure walked along and paused. Queen Talia turned a teasing smile upon the one who approached her now at the head of the stairs, but it soon became evident in her words and gestures that she was not pleased. The fist struck at her, and Alana clearly saw the wizard's insignia ring arcing toward her mother's head. The queen sought to dodge, only to trip herself so she went crashing down the stairs. The owner of the hand grabbed the rail — leaned and reached, getting but a glimpse of a small figure bolting back under the base of the stairs ...

Alana's hands flew out, clutching the surface of the dream catcher. She would have screamed had she been able — someone else did — and a door slammed back against the far wall.

Light sprang up all around her, and at first, she shielded her eyes from the amber glare. Corwyn's disheveled figure filled the bedchamber door. His eyes were wild with outrage, and his face was wet with tears.

"No!" he shouted. "By the gods, no more! I'll destroy the damned thing!"

He fixed brown eyes on Alana as though seeing her for the first time. His jaw dropped, the mouth working into an "o" shape. "Your highness ..." He shook his head. "No ... Alana!" His gaze flitted to the sphere repeated over and over the queen's tragic death that day. "No! Alana, no, you cannot tell them — please!"

Alana turned and raced for the door. She was slipping the bolt as feet pounded up behind her. Arms snagged her before she could escape. She was pulled around and pinned against the surface of the door.

"Alana, please, listen to me, child! It didn't happen that way! That's only a dream — you must believe me. I — loved your mother! I would never hurt her, but I've always felt somewhat to blame for her death — but I didn't cause it, I swear! Your father cannot see this, child! It would only renew his grief! Please, Alana! I swear to you! That was only a dream!"

She shook her head, furiously pummelling fists against him, and still he held her against the door. Desperation drove her to reach up and snag a handful of beard, jerking hard. The pain was enough to force him to relax his hold on her. She kicked a shin for good measure, then bolted under his arms and raced over to stand beside the sphere. There she stood and pointed at the dream catcher in an accusing manner. Corwyn regained his balance and his wits, leaning against the door and shaking his head.

"No!" he repeated. "It's only a bad dream I have! I did not cause her death! I am not to ..."

Alana continued to point to the sphere each time the dream's onlooker glanced over the rail — pointed to the small figure darting back under the stairs, then at herself. Corwyn lost his capacity for speech as he stared at the scene. Amazement flooded his face, turning quickly into woe.

"Oh, by all the gods," he finally whispered. "You were there, weren't you? I saw you, and I was so upset, I never even noticed you were there."

He seemed to have lost the last of his strength as he pushed himself away from the door and sank to his knees at her feet. "Alana, I'm sorry. You must understand. I didn't mean it — I made a mistake. I loved your mother and would not have hurt her for the world. Had I the power to undo her death, I would — but I cannot. Please — can you ever forgive me? Can you ever understand what it is like to love someone and never have them love you in return? You've been so good to me, child, coming to visit me when I thought the world would have turned against me had it known the truth. Please — forgive me?"

Alana shook her head. Her heart felt like a lump of ice in her breast, cold and unfeeling. And yet, as she looked at this pitiful man, she wanted to cry.

"Not even a little?"

She scowled at him with the blackest look she could manage, and from the surprise that briefly flickered in his eyes, she could only assume he was remembering that same look on her late mother's brow.

"Then why did you befriend me? Did you hope to see me undone by my own grief and guilt? Oh, never mind. I know you cannot answer that. I'm sorry, child. I never knew you hated me so." He sighed. "That knowledge shall only serve to make what I have to do now a little easier."

He came to his feet with an unsteady lurch. Alana was driven back, fearing that he now meant her harm. Instead, he turned and crossed to the door, pulling it open so she could see the hall.

"Go, child," he said. "I've work to do."

Slowly, she made for the door, her gaze ever wary as she passed him. Tragedy filled those brown eyes, making them soft and luminous in the amber dance of candles and torches. Once she was out of the room, he closed the door and slid the bolt in place. And as she ran down the stairs, she thought she heard a faint tinkle of glass ...

They say that in the kingdom of Arunane, King Kelvar's birthday feast was held under a quiet pall. Corwyn had been found in his chambers by the servants who were forced to break down his door. He lay on his floor, an ornate wooden stand overturned at his side, and under him they found a great deal of broken glass. Large shards had penetrated his chest so he bled to death where he lay.

"Poor Corwyn," people said, and speculated that he had been trying to carry his glass globe when he tripped and fell on it. "Tragic," they added, for they saw that Princess Alana shed many tears at his funeral.

Alana didn't mind their gossip. Trapped within her silence, she didn't have to tell them why she mourned. Too bad the dream catcher was broken. She had so hoped one day to use it to tell them the truth. Then again, what would truth have mattered now? Her mother would never be brought back, no more than Corwyn.

Forgiving herself sometimes felt as difficult as capturing the wind. And in her heart she knew the sweet taste of vengeance was as fleeting as a dream.

❧

Laura J. Underwood has had stories published in several volumes of **SWORD AND SORCERESS** and previous issues of *FANTASY Magazine* as well as many nonfiction articles and reviews. She is the head of the Periodicals Department at the Knox County Public Library. Her hobbies include hiking, biking, history, Celtic lore, and music. She is also a former fencing coach and was the Tennessee State Women's Foil Fencing champion for several years.

Ray Williams has been a professional (starving) artist for the last thirteen years and has won numerous awards for his work at conventions and art shows. He lives in Longview, Washington and shows his work at the WIZARDS art gallery in Kirkland.

Blossoms in the Night

by Lawrence Schimel

"Are you happy now?" Merle asked Edgar, as the tomcat sniffed around the pussywillows. Edgar paused, sat on his haunches and regarded the plants with eyes slitted, a drowsy look on his face. Merle adopted a drowsy look as well and peeked at their auras. Curled tightly in each bud was a kitten wrapped nose to tail around the branch. She had planted them that morning as a birthday present for Edgar.

"Content," the cat seemed to reply, then entered the cottage.

Merle shook her head after the beast and gathered up her garden tools.

A yowl split the night. Merle bolted upright in bed and looked around her.

Edgar hissed, dashing for the front door.

Merle ran after him. She didn't waste time grabbing for a robe, and now stood naked beneath the moonlight. She felt vulnerable without clothing as she heard growling in the darkness, then reached for the tranquility that would allow her to see auras. There was a ring of them, large white pit bulls, gathered around the pussywillows. Pale blue cords tied the dogs back to their tree, a dogwood growing in her neighbor's yard. The kittens mewled nervously, and clung, desperate and tiny, to their branches.

Edgar's hackles raised. Merle looked about for a stick to throw at the dogs, but Edgar was quicker. With another yowl he threw himself at the dogs, claws extended to sever their blue lifelines. The pack turned its attention to him, growling menacingly. To return the favor, Edgar swiped out and caught one by the nose. He leapt onto the back of another and dug in with his claws. The dog ran around in circles, trying to dislodge its rider. At last, Edgar leapt from its back, claws extended, and cut through the dog's lifeline.

Everyone stopped and watched as the dog howled in pain, head thrown back to

the moon. And then it was gone, a swirl of white petals in its place.

"Get!" Merle yelled as she advanced on the pack. The dogs glared at Edgar, who flexed his claws at them. They peeled away, grudgingly retreating, but the anger in their eyes showed they would be back.

Merle shivered as the night wind woke goosebumps on her naked flesh. "Do you think they'll be safe tonight?" she asked Edgar, nodding toward the pussywillows.

"I'll keep watch," the cat seemed to say as he walked stiffly into the shadows underneath the pussywillows. His eyes glowed like a pair of fireflies, and then winked out.

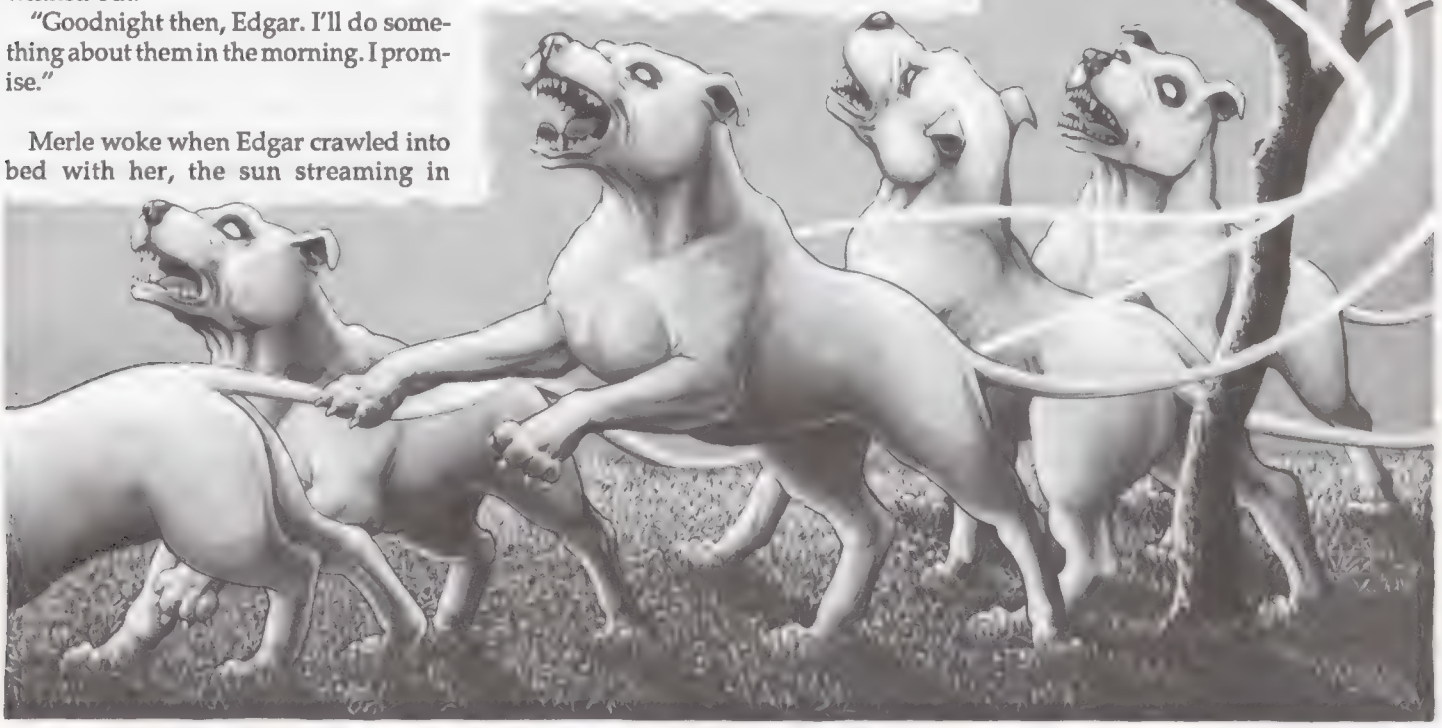
"Goodnight then, Edgar. I'll do something about them in the morning. I promise."

Merle woke when Edgar crawled into bed with her, the sun streaming in through the windows, and went to sleep on her pillows without a word. Merle dressed and set a pot of tea to boil. After breakfast she planted a row of snapdragons around the pussywillows and the cottage.

❧

Lawrence Schimel has stories published in quite a variety of anthologies including **SWORD AND SORCERESS VII, LERONI OF DARKOVER,** and **CAT-FANTASTIC III**. He has also sold a poem to another anthology — his first hardcover publication.

Barb Armata strays from her usual medium for this story to very good effect. She has dabbled in several areas of art, doing commercial signs and ads, comics, illustration, and paintings. Her depictions of "the odd, the alien, and the everyday" can be seen at Northeast sf art shows such as Boskone.



Artwork by Barb Armata

JAVANNA'S THREAD

by Shymala B. Dason

Javanna moved rapidly through the forest. Her feet made no sound as she stepped carefully, lightly. The mottled colors of her sellsword's leathers, mingled grays and browns, blended into the trees.

She slowed as she neared the wise woman's cottage. She was almost certain that she had reached here ahead of the men she'd seen that morning. Still, caution was a painfully learned habit.

She stood behind the last line of trees. They were oaks, heavy with hanging vines. Javanna parted the curtain of leaves, peered through. Then she saw Elana, and relaxed.

Robe tucked about her knees, the wise woman sat on the doorstep, one hand stretched out in front of her. Studying her intently was a fawn. Slowly it moved forward, nuzzled the outstretched hand. Javanna smiled, and stepped toward them. The animal whirled, startled.

Then it was gone.

Elana turned to the sellsword. "Javanna! Welcome, child. I did not expect to see you again this soon." She stood slowly. "Have you changed your mind?"

"No, El. I haven't." Javanna saw her foster mother's disappointment. Her throat was tight for a moment, with pity that overrode her own pain. Elana was getting old. The young woman could remember when the wise woman's body had not been so thick, nor her hair so gray.

Elana's face was composed again. "Why then have you returned? This cannot be a refuge for you. Javan will surely seek you here."

"I know. El, listen. I would not be here if it were not urgent. I came back to warn you. I saw two men this morning, not far from here. I knew them, they rode in my father's band until recently." She paused, fixed the wise woman with her eye, put as much urgency as she could into her tone. "He dismissed them a half-moon ago."

"So." Elana was calm. "They are outlaws."

Javanna nodded. "And they are planning to attack you."

"Why?"

Javanna shrugged impatiently. "There's no time to waste on it now. You know the stupid stories about witches' jewels ..."

"Well, I will just tell them they are mistaken." The wise woman smiled. "Anything I do have, they are welcome to."

"It's not that simple. They won't believe you, and they'll try to force it out of you."

Elana's smile became touched with sadness. She studied Javanna, taking in the tense body, the alert stance. "You would try to protect me," she said quietly.

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

Javanna nodded. The older woman shook her head in firm denial. "I will not allow it."

"But El —"

"No." Elana held up her hand for silence. "This is my home. I can't stop you following the path you want, but I will have no killing here."

Javanna stared at her, speechless with frustration. Elana had to be made to see ...

There was a sound. Footsteps approaching. Footsteps the sellsword recognized. Hasin and Borakim. Waving Elana into the house, Javanna darted into cover.

The wise woman did not move. She simply stood in front of her door, waiting. Javanna longed to drag Elana to safety, but she dared not come out of cover herself. Two against one was difficult at best. She had to preserve the element of surprise. She breathed deeply. Her body assumed the *alert* position.

Hasin and Borakim walked into the clearing. They saw Elana. Borakim paused. Hasin advanced, smiling coldly. "Greetings, Wise One." It was a proper address, but there was no respect in his voice or manner. Javanna watched in silence.

"Welcome." Elana divided the formal courtesy between the two men. "Who wishes service may ask it at my door."

Borakim spoke suddenly, blustering. "We want your jewel. Get it, quick, and you'll not be hurt."

She smiled tranquilly. "There is no jewel."

"You lie, witch!" Hasin slapped her, viciously. "We will have your jewel." Javanna began to move, quietly furious. She twisted her left wrist. A diskblade slipped neatly from her forearm sheath. She caught it in her right hand, the sharp, curved metal spikes cool against her palm.

Elana swayed, and Hasin struck her again. "Where is it?" She fell, and he raised his booted foot, kicked her in the side. She screamed. He raised his foot again, as Borakim nervously shouted, "Stop it, you fool!"

The kick never landed. A diskblade materialized, embedded in Hasin's throat. He staggered. Blood arced from his wound, spattered wetly on the ground. With a gargling sound, Hasin collapsed.

Borakim's hands went to his weapons. Then Javanna stepped out of the trees. She reached across her body with her right hand, drew her sword, stooped slightly, and slipped a heavy dagger from a boot into her left hand. Borakim swore, and swung toward her, pulling out his sword as he did so.

She straightened the wrist of her sword arm. Thumb and forefinger spread behind the guard as the other three fingers curled snugly around the hilt. She raised the sword in salute, and moved toward him.

"The company whore!" Borakim spat, and advanced to meet her. "I'm going to bury my weapon inside you — where you'll enjoy it the most. I just wish your precious father was here to see it."

"If he were you wouldn't be standing there!"

"But he isn't — is he?" He laughed, raised his weapon in a sketchy salute, then without pause brought it whistling down towards her head. She parried with her dagger. Their blades clashed, the force of the blow jarring her arm.

She countered, a side cut toward his body, which was efficiently parried. They circled, testing each other, little flurries of rapid movement, then wary disengagement. She was quicker, but he made almost two of her, and a lot of his bulk was still muscle.

He thrust at her heart. Her dagger stopped it as her sword swung for his neck, where the metal mesh guard was still unfastened. He parried, but not quite fast enough, knocking her blade out of position. Its point opened a long gash on his face, and he roared, his sword screaming toward her side. It slid off her dagger, but she could not stop the blow, and it caught her on her right hip, a slicing cut. She staggered, and he grinned. He began to force her back across the clearing.

Javanna retreated. She was losing blood. She had to finish this before her leg gave way beneath her. She fought for control of herself, fought the rising fear that would kill her. She had to think clearly. She let her thoughts dwell on Elana, lying mute and motionless, perhaps dying. Her anger rekindled. She fed it, and as it grew the fear receded, and she could think again.

Borakim's weakness. What was Borakim's weakness? He was gross, stupid but cunning, sloppy ... Sloppy! And slow. She remembered all the times he'd been bawled out for not taking care of his gear. Surely living wild could not have improved that. She began to study him, stealing occasional quick glances away from the flickering blades. Mercifully that inattention did not kill her, for Borakim was gloating now, savoring his kill.

Another head cut. She parried, glanced at the position of his dagger; then she noticed it. There was a gap in the metal rings on his leather tunic. Not above the heart, even he would not be so careless, but lower. It might be possible to pierce the stomach, or liver, or a kidney. She feinted at his side. His dagger followed, to block her blow. Then she lunged toward him, biting her lip at the pain in her injured hip as all her weight fell on that side, her right arm extended.

Borakim screamed as the point bit into his body. She had aimed well. Through the gap in the protective rings, and through his body. She straightened, drew her dagger in a sweeping movement across his throat. The grace stroke. His eyes were wide open, bulging out at her, their gaze fixed. It seemed minutes before they glazed.

He fell heavily. She panted as she stood above him, rolled the body over to remove her sword.

It was over. Wearily she raised her sword, gave Borakim the final salute. She wiped sword and dagger on the grass, sheathed them, and went to Elana.

The wise woman lay curled on her side in the doorway. Javanna knelt by Elana, turned her head, carefully, and rolled up the eyelids. The pupils were the same size. She moved her hands over the body slowly, pressing gently as she had been taught. Two broken ribs; nothing else that she could find.

She straightened, trying to think, to decide what to do next. She could not seem to focus. Her mind was blank, and she felt curiously lightheaded. She sprawled backward, suddenly faint.

She looked up, caught sight of the bodies lying in front of the cottage and felt her stomach convulse. A half-moon ago these men had been her shieldmates. She was suddenly, violently sick. After a long moment she forced herself to move. She limped into the cottage, found some linen strips, roughly bandaged the wound on her hip. Time enough for a more thorough job after Elana was tended.

She selected a bottle from the shelves covering the walls, went back outside. She knelt by the injured woman, uncorked the bottle and held it before her nose. Elana stirred, coughed. Blood flowed from her mouth. Javanna's lips compressed. The lung was punctured. Moving Elana might worsen it, but it had to be done. She slipped an arm under the woman, and began to lift.

Thanks to the stimulant, Elana could help herself, a little. She would pay for the exertion later, but now, leaning

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

heavily against the leather-clad arm, she made it to her bed, did her best to cooperate as her robe was lifted over her head. Then Javanna lowered her onto the sheets, and began working on her.

Elana endured her pupil's handling, swallowed with an effort the potion she was given. By the time her side was tightly bandaged, the wise woman was white-lipped with pain. As Javanna stripped and tended to her own hurts, Elana slipped into a drugged sleep.

The sellsword built up the fire to last through the night, made a hasty meal of cheese and bread, and prepared herself to spend the night in a chair by the fire.

Her wound hurt. She shifted several times, trying to ease it. She had not dared take any of the poppy juice herself, in case Elana should need her during the night. She stared into the fire. She was tired, lightheaded. Perhaps she dozed. Certainly her mind wandered, and presently she was remembering, reliving ...

The air had been rich with smells: roses, and fresh cut grass. Javanna walked slowly, a little stiff. Being bedded had hurt, as Elana had warned her it might. But the soreness would fade.

She smiled softly, fingered the blue tactician's badge newly sewn onto her leather jacket. It would be a surprise for Travis.

There were footsteps behind her. She stood still, very straight. *His* footsteps.

Now his hands were on her arms, and he was bending, his lips on her neck. She trembled. He turned her to face him; she watched the smile on his face disappear.

His finger stabbed at her breast. "What is that?"

She was bewildered. "My new badge. I wanted to show you how proud I was."

"Take it off."

"What?"

"Take it off."

"But why?" She searched his face; there was nothing there that she could read.

"I've changed my mind." She could only stare numbly now, trying desperately to understand, failing. He continued. "You cannot be my tactician. Your father is the only one who accepted it. The others laughed. *Laughed!* They asked if I was so poor a man that I must bring my wife even on campaigns, to tell me what to do."

"But you promised," she whispered.

"I have changed my mind."

"No. I won't agree. You can't do this to me."

"You are mine," he ground out. "Mine unto me. Your father gave you to me and I have taken you. Don't tell *me* what I can and cannot do with you. You will obey me."

"No. *No. No!*"

She ran from him, blindly.

Javan was alone when she found him. She poured out her pain to him as he stood before the high stone fireplace with the crossed pikes mounted on the wall above it. Then she waited, confident of his support, his love.

She was tall, for a woman. Still she had to look up to meet his eye.

"Why do you tell me this, daughter?" His voice was strangely rough.

She was bewildered. "But father, you trained me. Surely you can't agree ..."

Javan was large, dark, straddled before the fire. "I have given you to him."

"But Father ..."

"Do you argue with me?" His voice was so violent that she flinched, fell silent. "You are of my seed. Mine to keep or give, mine in nature and law. I have given you to Travis and you will obey him as you would me. Do you hear me?"

"My lord, you don't understand!"

"I understand my honor." Javan seemed to grow larger. "This Clan has not paid face money since its beginning. The contract has been signed — and sealed upon your body, has it not?"

Silently she nodded.

"Well." Javan breathed deeply. "Then do not trouble me." He sighed. "If your mother had lived to advise you, perhaps you would understand better. Now go. Do what you must."

She had searched his face, but there had been no yielding in it.

Javanna shivered, remembering. The night was cold.

She rose painfully, added wood to the fire, wrapped herself in a large shawl. Presently she slept.

Her shoulder was stiff. Javanna straightened her neck slowly and blinked, her eyes heavy with sleep. She glanced at the shuttered windows. No light leaked through them. Still night, then. She leaned back in the chair, tried to find a comfortable position, to get back to sleep.

She started. There had been a sound ... She turned, looked behind her. Elana was moving on the bed. Dreaming? The wise woman was muttering, disjointed words. The sellsword strained to make them out.

"Amulet ... use ... Find my thread. Find ... thread."

Javanna flung off the shawl, pushed herself out of the chair, wincing at the pain in her hip. "What? El?"

She limped over to the bed. "El?" she called softly. There was no answer. The wise woman was unconscious.

The sellsword frowned. She bent lower, studying her nurse's face, listening to the older woman's breath. She felt the pulse, and it was fluttering, weak, irregular.

Javanna stretched tiredly. Her leg was throbbing painfully, and she would have loved to go back to sleep, but Elana looked frighteningly frail.

She *could* return to Farrin to summon Healer Mathru. Her lips trembled. She tightened them. Then she drew a deep breath, released it slowly. Even if she were willing to go back, to return to the prison she had fled, still it would not help Elana. Mathru served Javanna's father only because Javan, though an Authram Clan Father, lived almost as the Sarran. It was his dead wife's will that had made the wise woman their daughter's nurse. No. The Healer had always ignored Elana. He would not come to her now.

Javanna frowned, turned away from the bed.

There was a small oil lamp on the table. She stifled a yawn, fumbled at her belt for her tinder box. She lit the lamp, then carried it over to the medicine shelves. A pity the wise woman could not dose herself — and that no others of her kind were near.

Javanna stared at the shelves in an agony of indecision. They were laden with pottery jars, and rolled cloth pouches. Then she noticed the two glass bottles on the top shelf. Beautiful clear glass, a gift from her mother. She had often seen these empty, but now the one held small white flowers, and the other delicate leaves of a fresh, golden green. Starblossom. Eftstra linia, Elana called it, flower of the Circle of the Web. And starblossom leaves. Surely these could do nothing but good. Elana had spoken often of their virtue.

Javanna propped the lamp against her chest, reached up for the first bottle, transferred it to the other hand, and reached for the second bottle.

She carried everything back to the table and then eased herself onto a stool, her injured leg stretched out before her. Now what? She'd let Elana teach her to bandage and splint and spread salve, and even to sew up open wounds — those skills were useful to a sellsword in the field. More she had always left to the Healer, or to Elana. Only now Elana ...

She sighed, faced the uncomfortable fact that she, Javanna, was afraid to touch anything that smacked of magic. She turned and looked at Elana, willing Elana to wake, to take this decision away from her, but the wise woman lay still. Very still. Only her head moved, restlessly, and her face twisted as if she were in pain.

Javanna squared her shoulders, took a deep breath. She could do it. She would do it because she had to. The lifelong love the old woman had shown her placed an obligation upon her that she could not turn away from. So.

She opened the bottles, carefully shook a few leaves and two of the starblossoms onto a clay saucer. The heady odor made her feel curiously lighter, and more alert. She smiled, encouraged, then looked around the room, a small frown in the center of her forehead. Then she saw the kettle and nodded.

Adding some wood to the fire, she swung the kettle over it. While the water heated, she used Elana's granite mortar and pestle and a fine cloth sieve to powder the leaves and flowers, mixing them together. Then, as she had often seen her nurse do with other herbs, she filled a deep bowl with boiling water and stirred in the eftstra powder.

Fragrant steam rose from the bowl, brought added color to the young woman's cheeks. She moved to the bed.

Elana's face relaxed a little as Javanna blew the steam into it, and some of the pain lines smoothed out — but that was all. The old woman was still unconscious. Javanna frowned in thought, then fetched a horn spoon and dipped out a small quantity of the liquid.

She had seen Elana do this with other brews, had often been the one being dosed. She could not remember her nurse describing this use of the starblossom, but ... She grimaced. There was only one way to be sure.

She lifted the spoon slowly to her own lips, took a cautious sip. It tasted surprisingly good. She waited. With a sudden shock she realized that the pain in her hip had subsided, and she was no longer cold. She finished the liquid in the spoon.

Well. She had waited, and she had felt no ill from the brew. She filled the spoon again, moved to the bed. She dribbled the potion into her nurse's mouth.

At first she had to massage Elana's neck to make her swallow, but then the old woman began sucking in the liquid herself. After the third spoonful, her eyelids fluttered, and she lifted her head.

"Javanna ..."

"Hush, El, I'm here. It's all right."

"Javanna ... the amulet!"

"Shh, don't try to talk."

"Amulet ... in chest."

The wise woman's head fell back again, and this time Javanna couldn't rouse her.

The young woman moved painfully back to the table, sat for a long time simply staring at it. She was so tired her brain felt numb. Elana's words kept running through her mind. *"Amulet ... in chest."*

Finally she sighed and got to her feet again. There were three chests in the cottage, all full.

Methodically she began to sort through them, one by one. A spare robe in a lighter fabric, the green cloak of a wise woman, and a variety of small personal items were all that she found in the first. She smiled wistfully over the contents of the second. An infant's robe and shoes, small hand-knit mittens, childish toys — all much worn. Javanna's clothes and Javanna's toys, that her nurse had cherished. She began to close the chest, then noticed a small silk-wrapped package at the bottom.

She undid the fastenings, unwrapped it slowly. It was a small piece of wood. The lines of the carving were rough, but she managed to make out a circle overset by a flowering shrub. She rose to her feet slowly, running her thumb over the amulet.

Curious. There was a tingling sensation in her thumb where it had stroked the wood. She laid the amulet on the table and studied it thoughtfully. By this point her curiosity had overcome some of her fears and she wanted to know how to use the thing. She concentrated, trying to remember all the stories Elana had filled her with as a child, stories about the glories of the Authram people before the coming of the Sarran, and of the wise women who had guided them. She closed her eyes.

Healings. Stories about healings. Mezra's bane, Ashoma and the eagle ... She had it! The healing of Garanth. Garanth had been the first Clan Father to become a friend of the Circle, the man who built the first sanctuary. She pressed her lips together.

Her hand dropped to finger her sword. It calmed her. And somehow she felt most *alive,* touching it. In her mind she could hear now, as she had heard as a child, Elana's voice telling the tale. "... then Mezra cast the herb of life into the flame ..."

Javanna opened her eyes. The herb of life surely meant starblossom. So. She added another log to the fire. Then she prepared the starblossom as before, powdering it, and tossed it onto the fire. For a long moment nothing happened. Javanna was just turning away, fighting both her disappointment and a feeling of foolishness, when a cloud of gray smoke billowed up. Hurriedly, she grabbed the amulet off the table. Holding it in trembling hands she leaned forward so that it was in the path of the smoke. Stiffly, self-consciously, she rubbed her fingers back and forth across it.

The carving looked finer now. She frowned down at it, then caught her breath sharply. The branches of the bush were growing under her hands, and *into* them. Smoke coiled upward, turning first yellow and then a clear bright green. Soon her hands were lost in the growing green cloud. The smoke was intoxicating.

She grew lightheaded, felt as if her body was moving away from her somehow, and she was unable to stop it. She panicked, fought for control. But her hands kept mechanically caressing the amulet. And now she was walking across the room. Not of her own will. She watched her legs move, with a gait that was not her own; she could not stop it.

Then she was beside the bed, and she watched her body bend with that same unnatural movement. That which moved Javanna lay her on the bed, her arms around the wise woman's body. Elana groaned, and now Javanna was even more frightened. Those broken ribs ... The amulet grew heavier and heavier in her hand.

The cloud filled the room, swirling gray-green. It whirled about her, and then there was a thread in it, a thread which was almost frayed into two. Her hand rose, though she struggled to control it. She felt a sharp stab of pain in her side as she touched the broken place, a burning that rose and rose as she stroked the thread.

She was screaming inside, but her body made no sound. *Lost. Lost.* She was lost. And as she thought that, she felt a calmness spreading over her, and that frightened her even more, because it was not of herself. She pushed it away, tried to drop the amulet; she could not.

The smoke thinned; it coalesced onto the wooden circle and began to glow. The light rose higher and higher and the amulet began to burn. She tried again to shake her hand, to drop the amulet, but could not. Motionless, she watched as the light grew till there was nothing outside the glowing green circle. She heard herself scream. Then she fainted.

She blinked, turned her head. She was lying on the bed, but where ...? Then she saw Elana, bending over the kettle. There was a pleasant, savory odor. Javanna's mouth watered. Through the open windows, the midday sun streamed in. She swung herself to her feet, then paused, astonished, as memory returned to her. Nothing hurt. Her hip, all the little cuts and bruises — she inspected herself — were gone. And Elana was healed. So. The power last night had been friendly. She shivered suddenly. Friendly or not, she didn't like losing control like that.

As they ate, she told Elana what had happened.

The wise woman frowned. "I had not realized the strength of your power. It must be trained."

"Trained? El, you're not starting that again? I am a sellsword."

"A woman with your power has a place with the Circle."

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

Javanna sighed. "El, I want a normal life. I want to be like other people. You know I respect you, and therefore I respect the Circle, but El, I want to live openly. This is Sarran. I may be Authram in blood, but I would not know how to act in a band of wise women. And I don't want to. I don't want to hide, to ..." She swallowed, began again painfully, as Elana watched her. "I want to live as I was raised to, and to do it with a man I love — I don't want to be different." She dropped her head in her hands. "I walk as an outlaw now, and I've lost Travis, but someday I'll find a way ..."

Elana snorted. "You did not lose Travis, you turned your back on him. At least be honest with yourself."

The sellsword lifted her head. Her eyes burned, but she would not allow herself to cry. "I had to. He betrayed everything I thought we shared."

"Well. He did, and you chose. Let me hear no more self-pity."

Javanna tightened her hands over her cup, but she said nothing. Elana nodded approval.

"Good. Now. You will come with me to the sanctuary, and you will learn the discipline necessary to still your mind. You have need of it." She glanced at the leathers the young woman wore. "You would not normally be acceptable to them, but with my word ..."

"Great Cold!" Javanna flung away from the table and began to pace up and down the room. "Elana, you've not heard a thing I've said. I am not interested in 'stilling my mind' — whatever that means — or being acceptable to your precious Circle."

"You must come with me. You have great potential which must be trained." The nurse looked at Javanna, and through her. "There are foretellings that the Circle of the Web will be restored to power." Her eyes focused again, and now she was earnest. "Javanna, daughter of my soul. What you did last night speaks of more untrained power than I have ever heard of. It may be *your* destiny to restore the Circle."

Javanna sighed, ran a hand through her hair. "No. I won't I don't want to, and I don't care about the restoration of the Circle. I'm a tactician, El. I'm going to Ratna to sell my sword."

"Then you will act the fool, even if you are not one. Well. So be it. I wash my hands of you. It is fortunate that I am old, and will die before I have to see the waste that you will make of your life."

Javanna was stung. "That's not fair, El. You're deliberately making it difficult for me. Can't you understand ..."

"I can understand that you are running from your fate." As Javanna stared at her in frustration, Elana softened her voice and continued, "Come for a time at least. Surely you need to know how to handle the power if it should come upon you again."

Javanna swallowed. She had not thought ... Reluctantly, she nodded.

Elana was smiling now. "Tomorrow then?"

Javanna nodded again, a single sharp jerk of her head.

"Tomorrow."

❧

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

Shymala B. Dason's previous sale to this magazine, "Harimau" in issue 15 (which took first place in the Cauldron vote), set off the great tiger-pupil controversy. She is working on a number of stories set in Asia, which she researches when visiting back home in Malaysia. Shymala also writes atmospheric analysis software for NASA's Mars Observer project.

Alan Gutierrez lives in Sedona, Arizona with his wife and daughter. He has been artist guest of honor at several sf conventions and has appeared in these pages a number of times previously. He is a well-known cover artist.

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Meris and the Green Stone

by Marilyn A. Racette

I stood on the window ledge and looked down. It was a long way to the moat at the foot of the tower, but down was my only way out. Red Robert's guards were clattering up the stairs and shouting at one another, making enough noise to raise the dead as they tried to break down the door to the tiny chamber behind me. I whistled for Kelezear, prayed for luck, and jumped.

The water was cold enough to freeze fire and I came up gasping for air. I'd barely caught my breath when a pair of beady yellow eyes and a large scaly snout broke the surface nearby; in a moment I was racing toward the bank, the moat monster right at my heels. I pulled myself from the water and scrambled up the muddy bank to Kelezear. The moat monster had slithered up behind me, but a well placed kick from Kelezear sent the creature scurrying back to the chilly water, caterwauling as it went. By this time the archers were in place. Kel and I galloped off into the sunrise, followed by a hail of curses and arrows so wide of their mark that I nearly choked on my laughter. It had been much easier to recover Prince Enoch's jewel than I had expected. Almost too easy, I said to Kel, though I wasn't complaining. Tomorrow the jewel would be back where it belonged, and I would have the rest of my commission.

I took a short cut through the forest of Emer and headed east on the old market road. It was high summer; the fields were full of ripening corn, the road was dry and dusty, and the air seemed to shimmer with the heat. We stopped midday by the banks of the Wadi, to eat and rest in the shade of the willows, and cool our feet in the shallows before crossing into Tiram, Prince Enoch's kingdom. Across the river, the old road threaded through wooded hills and shady hollows, past the old market towns of Forus and Wheatsfield, until it reached the fields and pastures that fan out south and west from the capital city. The main road runs straight as an arrow then, right to Bellas, sitting white and gleaming beside the grey-green sea, but we turned north, toward the feet of the mountains that march down to Bellas. Just past sunset we reached the outcrop that overlooks the city's north gate and climbed the ridge to make camp in a small clearing near the top. I was in no hurry to turn over Enoch's stone; tomorrow would be soon enough. I wanted time to compose a suitable report, highlighting the danger and difficulty of the job and providing a basis for renegotiating my fee to a higher sum. Of course, Enoch might feel more inclined to toss me in a dungeon than pay me. I needed to prepare for that possibility.

Before going to sleep, I took the jewel from the pocket inside my shirt. It fit neatly in the palm of my hand, a bit of green glassy stone that seemed to be lit from within with the soft light of a summer's afternoon on some green grassy meadow. Kelezear looked over my shoulder and snorted.

"You're right, Kel. Pretty as it is, it hardly seems worth all the trouble we've gone through, not to mention the amount Prince Enoch is paying us. I'd think he could get a dozen like it fairly easily, and I don't believe that story he told us about the 'family heirloom' for a minute. I wish I knew why he really wanted it back."

I turned the stone in my hands; except for the color, and the glow, which had faded, the stone seemed like many I'd fetched up from a stream or lake bottom — slightly misshapen, water-smoothed and -rounded, just a bit too heavy to be sent skipping lightly across a stretch of open water. I put the stone away, no wiser for my examination, and went to sleep, dreaming of ways to spend Enoch's money. I woke to the cold edge of a knife against my throat.

Jenna.

"Hello, little sister," she purred. "How nice to see you again."

Now Jenna is not my sister. I'd sooner be sister to a mudfish. Oh, we'd all been 'sisters' back at school, Keri, Signe, Luna, all of us. Even Jenna, who always seemed to be one step behind me.

"Nice to see you too," I said. I wanted to show her just how nice, but she knocked me out before I had the chance. When I woke, my hands and feet were bound, and dawn light was seeping through the treetops. Jenna sat beside the rebuilt campfire, drinking from a steaming mug and examining the green stone. She smiled as I struggled to sit up.

"Good morning, Meris. Rising a little late today?"

"Look, Jenna ..."

"I've just been looking at your little treasure, and it doesn't look like much, my dear. But then, one shouldn't judge by appearances, should one?"

I could tell by the way she was glaring at me that she was thinking of our little adventure in Amstel some months ago; she still couldn't believe that I hadn't betrayed her. Not that I wouldn't have, given half a chance.

"I wonder," she continued, looking at me slyly, "who would pay me the most for this little bit of glass? Your esteemed employer, Prince Enoch? Or perhaps Red Robert would like the stone returned to him? Do you suppose there would be an extra bonus if the thief who stole it was also returned? Alive?"

I winced at that while Jenna rocked with laughter. Red Robert's reputation for dealing with 'uninvited guests' was more than notorious. In his hands, a quick death would be a blessing.

"Look, Jenna, you've got the stone ..."

"Yes, and I've got you too, dear. Poor little Meris, I wonder what he'll do to you first. Rip out your lying tongue? Pluck out those pretty green eyes? Oh, I wish I could be there in the torture chamber ..."

Her scream died on the wind. I stared at the spot where Jenna had been sitting. Nothing was there. Nothing but the green stone, winking in a shaft of morning sunlight. I began to understand why Enoch had wanted the stone back so badly. A wishstone is a handy thing to have.

It took a while, but I worked the ropes loose. Kelezear sauntered into the clearing, looking only mildly embarrassed about deserting me.

"You know, Kel," I said, as I pocketed the stone, "it's been quite a while since we visited Signe. I guess we'll send Enoch a report explaining how we were ambushed and the stone was stolen. Or maybe we'll just wish that he'd forget all about it."

As we headed north to the mountains, I wondered if Jenna would talk her way out of this one.

❧

MARILYN A. RACETTE works in a bookstore in Boston, thus being able to indulge her reading habits cheaply. "Meris and the Green Stone" is her first professional sale.

MERLE INSINGA has been nominated for the Hugo Award for Best Fan Artist five times (and keeps her fingers crossed). Examples of her work may be seen in books published by NESFA Press and *Cricket Magazine for Children*.

Marion Zimmer Bradley Talks To Writers:

Do You Know the Way to Miskatonic?

The first managing editor of this magazine did a heroic job establishing our format. But the best illustration of what I find most satisfactory about Rachel, our current editor, has little to do with any personal problem I had with Jan; I only managed to articulate it the other day when, looking at an item on my wall, I remembered an interchange with the first editor midway in my attempt to resolve some of our differences.

The item on my wall is a very realistic-looking diploma, hung beneath my "real-life" diploma from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas (from which I really did graduate), crediting me with a Master's Degree from Miskatonic — I don't really have one from anyplace — and put up there for fun. Imagine my astonishment when Jan innocently asked me, one day, "Oh, is that where you got your degree? Is it a nice campus? Where is it?"

Here was my opportunity for a really superb leg-pull — to tell her all kinds of stories about Miskatonic and its weird professors and nonhuman students. Although I would have done just that, of course, with a known fan, I couldn't forget that she had offhandedly — but seriously — asked me one day, "Who is Robert Heinlein?"

And she wasn't having me on; she really didn't know. So I explained to her that the town and the University of Miskatonic existed nowhere except in the fertile imagination of the late Howard P. Lovecraft — and I had made use of them both for my novel **WITCH HILL**. That some Lovecraft fans had made up the diploma, and that my second husband, a gifted calligrapher in one of his more harmless talents, had embossed it with my name just for fun, and I'd hung it on my wall in the same spirit. Jan said "Oh," and I, at least, forgot the whole thing for months.

But this embodies — at least for me — why I never quite felt at ease with her despite the general excellence of her editing, and why — in spite of many differences in working style — I am quite comfortable with Rachel: Jan didn't know the first thing about science fiction and fantasy.

This is what I want to say to writers this month and after. You should be thoroughly familiar, not just with science fiction and fantasy, but with literature in general. Most of what I know about editing, and about fiction, was picked up almost unconsciously by reading — omnivorously, incessantly, and obsessively — all kinds of fiction, and knowing what had been done, what had been done too often, what had never been done, and what works — and perhaps even more importantly, what doesn't.

One of the things I have absorbed is that when somebody, for instance, starts a novel by introducing fourteen important characters in the first two pages, I decide this story isn't going to work, and don't put myself to the trouble and exasperation of plowing through the rest of it. Because ninety-nine times out of a hundred I know that story isn't going to work for me. If the story is by someone like Arthur C. Clarke, I'll give it a few more pages because I know from experience that he may just bring it off; but if it's by Susie Simpson from West Nowhere, Idaho, I'll know I can probably save myself the wear and tear on my eyesight. Granted, I might miss an exciting new talent — but the odds are against it.

An editor has to play it by ear. If he doesn't provide his readers with something they like, he'll be back in the breadline. He can take a chance once in a while — but most times he has to play it fairly safe. Once a year I might buy a cover story by someone I'd never heard of — as when I printed Dawn Albright's "Black Ribbon". I thought it was a wonderful story, though it violated about four of my guidelines. It was horror; it was fairly gruesome; it was a thoroughly adult theme while most of our readers are young and unsophisticated. It went over very well; I didn't get any letters from outraged mothers of eight-year-olds. But I still remember the story "Moonrise", in the first issue. I'd guessed that it was, as I thought, the best story in the issue. Not only did it not get mentioned in the Cauldron, but letters showed that some readers didn't get it — at least one reader thought that the end of the story had been omitted by the printer and that the story was incomplete. A story I'd thought just barely good enough to print in that same issue (one of my advisers flatly said I should **not** print it) — "Luck of the Draw" — was the most popular story in the issue.

So I know perfectly well I can be wrong. But I can't afford to

be wrong too often, and nine times out of ten I play it safe.

That is why I am unlikely to buy a cover story by an unknown very often; usually I'll go with a story by one of my known writers.

So, in general, you should figure out what we want, and write it for us. We both want to stay in this business for a long time.

It beats being a plumber. That's why I react with some asperity when people send me stories which show that not only haven't they read my guidelines, but they've never even seen an issue of the magazine.

Even a plumber has to know how to use a monkey wrench. ❧

Writers Talk Back

Who's Telling This Anyway?

by Parke Godwin

Last time I described a simple process for getting your book started and touched briefly on Voice and Point of View (POV). Since they are early and vital considerations in your story/book, they deserve discussion on their own.

Voice is the person (first, second, third — hereafter FP/SP/TP) in which your story is told. For an intense, narrow focus story with relatively few focal characters, FP may be best, events happening to and described through the eyes of your protagonist, "I". FP becomes less effective as the focus broadens. Imagine Tolstoy trying to get the sweep of **WAR AND PEACE** into one person's experience, or Irwin Shaw attempting the same in **THE YOUNG LIONS.**

SP — "you" — is rarely used in fiction and I can recall only one or two examples. Its narrative effect is a variation of FP, within which, brief lapses into "you" are understood by the reader to mean that "I" is speaking of his own feelings/experience: "When something like that happens to you, you really feel like you're a nothing." Where FP is appropriate, its advantages are intimacy, immediacy, and intensity: a direct communication, as Guenevere in **BELOVED EXILE** grieves and rages at dead Arthur when she buries him —

> Even at the end I don't know if you thought of me or Morgana, cried to me or to her... I would have heard you down the length of Britain — but there was only your letter and silence, and I'll feed my own entrails to the fox while they bury good King Arthur as a goddamned legend... This isn't us, not you and me. Break out of that lie and hold me, fight me, make love to me... Why didn't I come to you instead of Lancelot or say the things I felt, and why have you gone and left me with the bleeding mess of it all?

That's pretty personal, so you have to get inside "I" and know him/her down to the socks, what basic nature, weaknesses and strengths, the sum of life "I" has lived up to the narrative moment. "I" must also be at the fulcrum of events, most dramatically affected by them and/or most qualified to impart them to the reader. The drawback of FP is that "I" is not omniscient. Other characters have to be observed from the outside, their actions/dialogue filtered through the experience of "I".

Cross-gender FP is even trickier. Here be tygers and quicksand. If you're a man writing in a woman-skin, you'd best have logged some field study, as it were, or your "I" will be less an honest portrait than an indication of your own inexperience and/or prejudice. Mickey Spillane, author of the Mike Hammer novels, knew nothing of women as whole human beings, presenting them as sex objects for a male blue-collar readership: all beautiful, exuding hormones like sweat, and dangerous as coral snakes. Likewise the post-adolescent sexual conquest fantasies of John Norman's *Gor* books. The opposite holds as true in a plethora of female warriors/sorceresses who knew little about men and wanted even less to do with them. It strikes me that to write convincing cross-gender in any voice takes as much honest empathy and liking as experience, living through and discarding one's own fear-misconceptions. Difficult but not impossible. Think of Flaubert's **MADAME BOVARY**, Tolstoy's **ANNA KARENINA**, or Dreiser's **SISTER CARRIE**, third person to be sure but women observed by male writers with total empathy. Consider the men portrayed by Katherine Anne Porter in **SHIP OF FOOLS** or Margaret George's stunning **AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF HENRY VIII**, in which she holds your riveted attention for 1300 pages largely in the king's "I" voice.

Third Person is most commonly used in novels and is the most flexible voice, allowing the author and reader to eavesdrop "over the shoulder" of any character and to reveal their inmost thoughts. Voice here *is* omniscient, pulling back for overview or zooming in for closeups, cutting away to offstage events of which the protagonist(s) are unaware — but even in this godlike voice lurk stumbling blocks for the unwary or complacent. Your narrative voice can easily do what it never should, call attention to itself. ("Look at me writing gorgeous prose.") Time and again I've labored over passages that delighted my own eye and ego, only to cut them for the above reason. In **ROBIN AND THE KING** there were several future extrapolations that fascinated me but pulled the reader years beyond the story setting. My copyeditor flagged them as author-intrusion. I cut them, since a smooth, self-effacing narrative voice was far more needed than a momentary digression wherein I dazzled myself with my own footwork. The best TP voice not only pulls the strings invisibly but indeed makes the strings themselves disappear. The accompanist does not take attention away from the singer.

A great deal has been written about what is or is not permissible within these voices — dictums laid down, I suspect, by pedants more concerned with form than content. Certainly form is as necessary to fiction as bone to flesh, and study of good examples will profit anyone. It's a good idea to know the rules before you break them, but "break" is inaccurate in this context. Rules are not made to be broken but *restructured*. If this were not true, Romantic music would not have evolved from the Classical period and American Airlines would be serving lunch on a larger version of the Wright brothers' plane. In **THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF HENRY VIII**, the author subtitles the book

WITH NOTES BY HIS FOOL, WILL SOMERS and intersperses Henry's "I" with a second FP in Will's letters to a female relative long after Henry's death. This gave me at least the satisfying overview of events and motives by a more reflective observer wisely and warmly aware of Henry's human failings, a device richly enhancing the narrative while never intruding as author voice. The same technique worked marvelously in Morgan Llywelyn's **RED BRANCH**, where the TP story of Cuchulain is chorused with comments by a war goddess who would much rather have been in charge of love, but someone had to do the dirty jobs.

My novel **SHERWOOD** was written TP because the historical characters held as many possibilities as the familiar Robin Hood legend. To consign William the Conqueror and Queen Matilda to mere backdrop was artistically wasteful. I went "over the shoulder" of each, leading into their thoughts in TP, then double-spaced and went into that character's FP voice. My agent thought this was dead wrong but the editor had no problem, which may tell you something about your vision vs. other opinions. Humility is healthy, but sometimes you're flat out right. The device put the reader inside the character's thoughts without resorting to long stretches of italics and allowed me enormous freedom over a large cast. The choice recalls a pithy remark once overheard from an actor in rehearsal, criticizing the "Method" school of acting. "The hell with being real. Be *interesting*." Quite true, if misleading. You must be real enough for the reader to suspend disbelief, but interesting as well. Failure of the first may not be fatal; failure of the second gets rejected or remaindered. Q.E.D. and 'nuff sed.

Now let's consider Point of View within TP where you have the latitude to choose between character viewpoints within a scene. Editors and readers complain rightly about changing viewpoint within a scene. This *is* a no-no that muddies and vitiates your story. Easily said, but what kind of scene are we talking about and how many characters onstage?

In a scene with multiple characters, the omniscient overview is usually most workable, though within this you can get quick cuts to individual colors and reactions. A three-scene or two-scene is best done from the POV of a focal character. This gives you dramatic depth and specific color. The author talking about a character is never as immediate as the character speaking for him/herself. A two-scene should be even more carefully viewpointed. Unless your reasoned choice is over the shoulder of one person throughout, choose the POV that (a) best furthers the story and (b) is most dramatically effective.

In **LIMBO SEARCH**, I wrote an emotional two-scene between Gunny Willington and Jan Tyne, male and female burnout fighter pilots, who have had an affair. Gunny wants to marry Jan, while she evades commitment because of traumatic combat experience and a deeper fear which has made her more afraid to live than to die. After her savage blowup at another woman, Gunny takes Jan aside and says, "Okay, what was that all about?" I could have done the scene from Jan's POV and almost did, but chose Gunny because he observes and empathizes with Jan while drawing painful truths from her —

> Her cheeks were streaming tears, the awkward, homely pain of a proud woman living with her own kind of self-contempt. "Look at me, Gunny. *Look* at me. How much woman do you think is left?" She couldn't see his eyes sweep over her in a caress and a loving pity, like pulling warm covers over a frightened child.

This is a scene *about* Jan but experienced through the eyes of a man who loves and understands her. The scene could have been as validly done from her POV. After the usual mess of first draft, I ended the first part with Gunny's exit, double-spaced and resumed it from Jan's solo POV —

> hugging herself into the smallest space possible, as if to let go would leave the raw wound of her unprotected, only to be pierced again. She finally said it. He pulled the hurting thing out of her, and even then her cry for help had come out ugly and hard. *Look at me.* After all the years, how much woman was left, how much of the courage that came so easily to Ellie Roven, against the scary time when she couldn't *do* anymore but still had to *be*?

A few pages later when Jan has a breakdown, the reader is prepared for the fact and her subsequent actions.

None of the foregoing is Gospel but meant to give you reasons behind the rules of Voice and POV, as well as the freedom (and the necessity) to restructure them to your own needs. Both are vital to your dramatic narrative, so take the time to consider the first and plan the second, and never be afraid to make a wrong choice on the way to the right one. You won't do hard time for it, so go with the experience and get on toward being right.

This column marks my first appearance as a regular with this 'zine. In future we can take up other considerations like building a character and dialogue.

The Results of the Cauldron

The voting results for issue #20 are as follows:

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"Night Stand" by Frank Tuttle**
- 2nd Place: **"The Basilisk" by Lucy Cohen Schmeidler**
- 3rd Place: **"Trap-Tricker" by Julia S. Mandala**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Vincent DiFate for "Night Stand"**
- 2nd Place: **Alicia Austin for "Maiden, Are You Warm?"**
- 3rd Place: **Armand Cabrera for "Fire Man"**

Congratulations to all the winners! To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64. Your interest and enthusiasm mean a lot to us at ***FANTASY* Magazine.**

Mages of Carthia

by Cynthia McQuillin

The wind blew crisply through Kurlin's long dark hair and ruffled the thick cloak he wore as he stood on the main deck of the trade ship, *Sovlan's Fortune*, surveying the dock. He could hardly believe that this was the fabled Isle of Kantu, home of the vanished race of Carthia. The dock was well-kept and the buildings neat and ordered, but it seemed like any other island port he'd seen in his years of travel.

The powerfully built young trader had traveled halfway 'round the world, facing many hazards in his search, believing that his fortune would be assured if he could but secure a supply of potions and charms from the legendary wizards of Kantu. Many had scoffed at his "fool's quest", saying that the Carthic Mages existed only in legend; but there had been many things that rang true in the old tales that his father had told him. So many of the clues had proved accurate that he had to believe the scoffers were wrong. When *Sovlan's Fortune* miraculously fell into his hands, the legacy of a scarce-known uncle, he'd begged funds from his father to finance an expedition, and set sail.

That had been sixteen months ago. Now, at his journey's end, he was torn between the ghost of anticipation and the very disappointing reality of Kantu. He'd expected a more opulent or fantastic facade for the home of a magical race. His optimism, however, allowed him to rationalize that since they had withdrawn from civilization, renouncing the worldliness of the masses, they would of course choose to live simply. With a sigh he went below to make sure everything was in readiness for his journey ashore.

Sifting carefully through every scrap of information he could find, Kurlin had chosen his trade goods with care. Since the wizards were noted ascetics, he'd gathered four of the rarest volumes of philosophy and religion that he could find — including *Spirit Songs*, a volume of lore almost as lost in legend as the Carthic Mages themselves. Such scholarly works weren't favored by the wealthy of the Selvan Empire so they were acquired at a good price. Because those of Carthia were also reputed to be lovers of beauty, he had the volumes bound in intricately worked and painted leathers. The remaining funds he invested in outfitting the *Fortune* properly and stocking her with supplies. Most of the crew had agreed to work for shares and keep; it seemed he wasn't the only man in Selv who yearned after legends and adventure.

As an afterthought, he had decided to include a set of histories of the known world. After all, knowledge was knowledge; and he hoped to interest the Mages in opening a regular trade route with the Empire. His family would hold the control of that route, of course, with himself being the youngest trader ever elected to the Council of Commerce. To credit Kurlin's youth, this was more of a pleasant fantasy than a genuine ambition.

Once the precious volumes and the standard gifts and trade goods were unpacked and properly prepared to display, he led a deputation ashore to seek audience with the local authorities. This proved rather difficult. The inhabitants paid them little attention, and though they apparently spoke the standard trade tongue, they seemed at a loss as to what it was that Kurlin wanted. When he asked to meet with someone in authority, they told him to talk to anyone, for they all had an equal voice in the community.

When he'd completed a tour of the village, Kurlin had to admit that there really didn't seem to be any sign of class distinction, at least outwardly. All of the houses were well-constructed and of a simple, if pleasing, design. In fact, everywhere he went he found the grounds and buildings neatly kept and in excellent repair, though he saw no one laboring. Indeed, he saw no sign of any industry at all. He thought perhaps everyone had stopped working because of the presence of foreigners. One thing did strike him as particularly odd for a community of that size; there were no trading houses or public buildings of any kind.

When asked where travelers would find food or lodging, Hantu, the funny little old man who had appointed himself their guide, told them they might ask for food or lodging anywhere they pleased. When questioned as to payment he looked confused and finally said that news, stories or a new song or joke were always welcome.

Convinced that the Carthic Mages

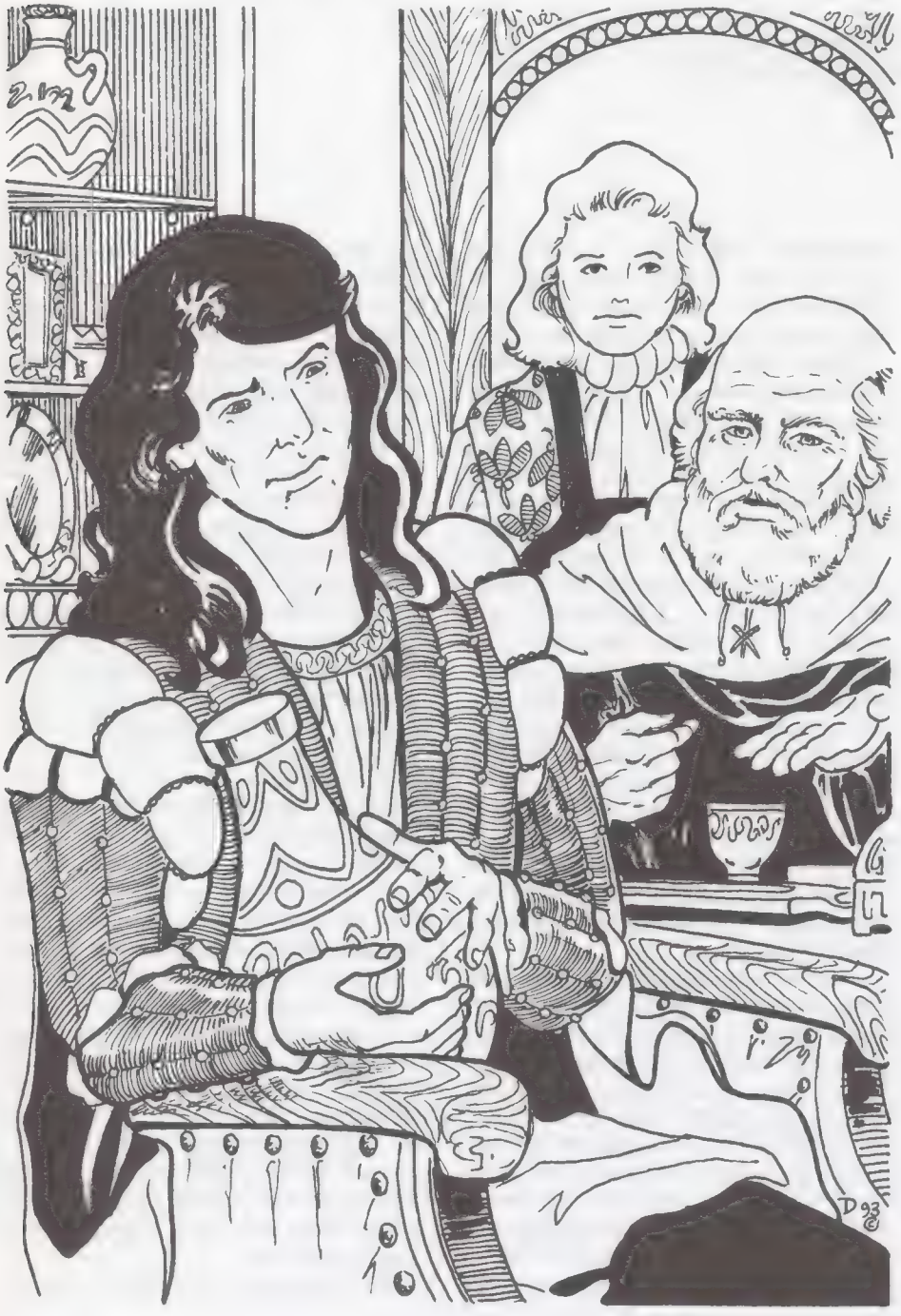
must have their stronghold somewhere else, Kurlin decided to lead an exploratory party to the rest of the island. Hantu agreed to take them wherever they wished to go and provide bearers for their supplies, since they had no beasts of burden.

A week later, after a very thorough search of Kantu and the surrounding islets, Kurlin finally accepted Hantu's offer of hospitality. Not only had he failed to find the stronghold of the Carthians, he had found no sign of any other habitation. Though he was frustrated, he couldn't quite shake the feeling that he was missing something really important. He decided that it was worth a few days layover to see if patience would render a reward.

The elderly sprite welcomed Kurlin to his home with a gracious gesture and a twinkle in his leaf-green eyes. His wife Berta came forward and curtsied with a girlish giggle, then she tugged lightly on Hantu's wispy grey beard saying, "So, old man, what have you brought me tonight?"

"A Master Trader, my wife, one who is well-travelled and wise in the ways of the world." he replied.

"Such wisdom is dangerous, husband," she replied, lowering her eyes with a sobered expression. "But since it is your wish I will welcome him to our family."



Berta was a little taller than her husband and somewhat younger than he. Though she was plain of face and wide-hipped, there was something in the clarity of her grey eyes and the directness of her manner that made you look twice. Surely she was a person to be reckoned with, not at all like the women of Selv. Apparently the couple, although obviously content in one another's affection, had no children. That was another thing that bothered him, now that he thought about it. No matter where they had gone on the island, he had seen no children. He thought, sadly, that perhaps a plague had killed off all the young ones or some disaster had rendered the women barren; but when he asked Hantu about this, the old man smiled, spread his arms to encompass the house, said, "They are here."

Kurlin decided that it was probably their way of saying that the children's spirits were still with them and let the subject drop as Berta returned with platters laden with fruits, cheese, and fine-textured breads. There were also bowls of an excellent nut porridge flavored with honey and dried fruit, and a jug of the most flavorful, robust ale that he had ever sampled. Though these people lived simply, Kurlin had to admit that they lived well.

When he had finished eating, he examined the dishes and serving pieces. To his surprise and delight he found that though their shapes were simple, they were made of beautiful lustrous woods of various subtle shadings. Each piece had been worked with intricate patterns; some had even been inlaid with opalescent shells, colored stones, or metal. The patterns were irregular but balanced. They reminded Kurlin of words or sentences, though they were made up of no letters he had ever seen. He was totally enthralled. He found himself stroking the jug, longing to possess it. It was warm and satiny to the touch and smelled subtly of wood and ale.

He saw that Berta and Hantu were smiling knowingly at each other when he woke from his reverie. He asked who had made the dishes; Hantu and Berta looked at one another and bobbed their heads in pleasure.

"These are the daughters of our art," Berta said softly as she began to gather them up. It was a quaint phrase, but the young trader thought it charming.

Dameon Willich

"Do you have others?" he asked eagerly.

Hantu nodded, then asked Berta to bring out four more items. She brought in a spinning wheel, a loom, a stringed instrument, and an urn. They were all as lovely and well-made as the other things had been, but he saw no value in the spinning wheel or loom. The instrument and the urn, however, were a different matter.

"Would you be willing to sell these?" he asked, trying not to let his avarice show. But, as so often before, he was met with incomprehension.

"I want to have them," he said simply.

"You would take our children?" Berta asked in alarm.

"No," he tried to reassure her, "not take. I would trade for them."

She looked suspicious, but Hantu comforted her saying softly, "He does not choose his words well. He means to give us something of his that he believes of value in return for our children. He perceives them only as things."

"But that isn't true," Kurlin averred, as he searched through the package of carefully packed trade goods for something to offer them. "I can see that they are more than just things, they're works of art." At last he found what he was looking for.

"Here," he said, handing Hantu a book entitled *A History of Baria*. "I would give you this for the platters and the jug. It's a book of great knowledge with stories from a land far away."

Hantu smiled indulgently at him, his hand smoothing the cover appreciatively. "It is a handsome gift," he agreed, as he opened the cover to admire the colored inks used in the map on the first page. "It has been a long time since I have seen a work of this nature. It was lovingly crafted, but it would hardly take the place of any one of these." He gestured to the table where the serving dishes were laid.

"Husband," Berta called softly from where she knelt beside the bundle that Kurlin had left open on the floor. Her eyes were wide as she reached out toward the leather-and-gold-bound volume that lay on top, not quite daring to touch it. It was *Spirit Songs*, his special treasure.

"Would you give this?" Hantu asked solemnly as he knelt beside his wife.

"No." The trader shook his head. "That book is worth more than all of your children."

For a few minutes the old couple huddled together in tense whispers. At last Hantu rose, saying that he must speak to the others of the village. Kurlin smiled to himself, thinking, *Now we're getting somewhere.* It was obvious that the couple had recognized the book as something the Mages would value and that the old man would now go to inform them of its presence. Sure that he was nearing his goal he agreed to wait while Hantu spoke to the "others". Apparently it hadn't taken long for a decision for he returned in less than an hour with an offer.

"It is agreed," the old man announced breathlessly as he entered the house. Berta rushed to help him to a chair and get him some of the excellent ale. When he recovered he continued, "If you will accept the trade," he stumbled over the unfamiliar word, "we will offer you the choice of the best of our treasure brides." Kurlin began to protest, but Hantu silenced him with a wave of his hand. "You will choose one daughter from each household. They shall be brought to your ship tomorrow at noon."

"That's what, twenty-seven in all?" Kurlin asked.

Hantu nodded. "Surely this is enough for any man?"

The boy in his heart was disappointed; he had been certain that the Mages would manifest themselves now and offer him fabulous treasures for the rare volume of spirit lore, but the trader was shrewd enough to see that there was still a profit to be made. So he put on his best showroom smile and said, "It's agreed, then." He leaned over to pick up the history book from where Hantu had left it and pressed it into the small man's hand. "You have done well by me."

"I am overwhelmed at your generosity," he said in genuine surprise. "But it is not necessary."

"Keep it." Kurlin smiled, turning to pack his things." Consider it a gesture of friendship. Now I think I must get back to my ship."

"But it's late," Hantu protested. "Will you not stay the night?"

"I think not," the young man replied. "There will be things to prepare on the ship for tomorrow."

"But it's dark," the old man pleaded, "and there are no lights. You could hurt yourself or lose your way."

"Is there some reason you want to keep me here?" Kurlin inquired coldly.

"Only what I have said," he answered, spreading his hands. Hantu was troubled by the growing suspicion he sensed in the young foreigner.

"If you feel you must go now," Berta said in a reasonable tone, "then at least let my husband go to your ship for men with torches to light your way. You will want help with your things anyway."

Without knowing why, Kurlin found himself agreeing with the strange little woman.

As Berta brought out a cloak for Hantu, walking with him to the front hall where his cap and scarf were hung, Kurlin overheard her say, "We have done him nothing but good, and now because of his greed he behaves like this!"

"Peace, woman," Hantu answered softly. "It was always the way of the world. He will understand in time."

"Be careful, beloved," she murmured, lowering her eyes.

Gently the old man cupped her chin in his hand, raising it until her gaze met his. "I have no fear. These are not evil men, they are only worldly."

"There is enough danger in that," she replied, and turned away.

"I will be careful," the little man said as he slipped out the door.

Time seemed to pass with leisure, though it was actually only about forty minutes before Hantu returned with two of the *Fortune*'s burly crewmen. It was with embarrassed relief that Kurlin directed the sailors to take his pack outside, turning with false heartiness to thank his host and hostess. Berta sniffed at him, but Hantu smiled and with a twinkle in his eye said, "I will keep the book, and your friendship."

"Thank you," Kurlin said with genuine gratitude, then turned to join his men.

The sun rose early the next morning, but not as early as the master of *Sovlan's Fortune*. He felt like the trader's lad he had once been, eagerly awaiting his first bazaar. So what if he hadn't found the Carthic Mages? He was the youngest ship's master in all the Selvan Empire, and he was about to return home after almost a year and a half, with a nice profit from his maiden voyage.

The day went well. The pieces that the Kantuan villagers had brought to the ship for his choosing were first quality, and each villager murmured happily at his compliments, saying that he had made a princely offering for their daughters. There was something about that phrase that was beginning to bother him, but he shrugged it off, reminding himself how unfounded his suspicions of Hantu had been the night before.

By the time he'd made his final choice, the sun was sinking and he was weary to

the bone. What little sleep he had the previous night hadn't rested his mind or body; but he still had wits enough to reply graciously when Hantu offered his farewell blessing: "May you live long in joy, using well all you have taken today."

When the last villager had at last walked solemnly down the gangplank, he inventoried each item personally, having a few of his favorite pieces taken to his cabin. The rest were stowed below. Finally, in happy exhaustion, he fell into his bunk and slept deeply.

He woke the next day feeling oddly troubled. His dreams had been strange, filled with the whispering voices of young girls, and the sounds of weeping. Immediately he rose and went to look at his personal treasures. They were as he remembered them; nothing seemed amiss. Still, the feeling persisted. Lightly, almost of their own volition, his fingers played across the satiny surface of the ale jar. It was the one that had first enthralled him at Hantu's.

The wood seemed warm to his touch as he remembered the wonderful ale that Berta had served him. He could almost smell it. No, by the Gods! He could smell it. When he picked up the jar it sloshed. When he poured the golden frothing liquid into his mug and drank it was exactly as he imagined it would be. Excited by this discovery he called for his cargo master.

"We make ready to sail on the tide, cousin," the cargo master said as he entered. "It turns in four hours."

"Good enough, Mako," he replied, "but I have something to show you."

"Indeed?" his kinsman said, raising his brow in query.

"Have you breakfasted yet?" Kurlin asked casually.

Mako shook his head and awaited enlightenment. Kurlin smiled as he showed him the empty platter, bread board, and jug. Then he concentrated on remembering the food that had been there before, but when he opened his eyes there was nothing. Maybe he was trying too many things, so he concentrated on just the bread board, but when he lifted the cover it remained empty. Mako looked at him as though he were daft.

"If you want breakfast, just say so. I'll have it fetched," he said at last, and left.

"I don't understand," Kurlin murmured to the empty air. "It worked before. I just closed my eyes and envisioned what I wanted."

When he opened his eyes again there was the platter of fruit, the jug full of ale and the scent of warm bread rose from the covered board.

"That's it!" he cried, "It only works for the person who owns it. By the Gods, I have found them!"

Just then Mako returned with the stowage report. When he saw the food he said irritably, "Why didn't you tell me you'd ordered breakfast? I just sent another order down."

Kurlin smiled at him saying, "Cousin, you have been a true friend as well as kinsman to me through all of this and I wish to reward you." He picked up the fruit tray intending to

give it to Mako but he suddenly heard the sound of weeping, and found he couldn't complete the gesture.

"Kurlin, are you all right?"

"Yes," he replied with a sigh, as he put the platter down. "I guess I'm just tired. Anyway, I wanted to give you an extra two percent of the cargo share since the trip has been so long."

"Well, now, that's worth drinking to," Mako boomed, pouring them both a mug of ale. He sighed appreciatively as he wiped his mouth. "You must have gotten a cask of the local brew. This sure isn't the slop we've been drinking."

"Yes," he replied thoughtfully. "In fact, I think that I'll go ashore and talk to Hantu about getting some more, and maybe a few other provisions as well."

Berta answered the door, letting him in with a reproachful look.

"Where's Hantu?" he asked.

"He has gone with the other men to install the book in the Shrine of Knowledge," she said softly.

"I know your secret." he said simply,"but I don't understand."

"What is there to understand?" She motioned him to sit.

"Why do the objects only work for me?"

"Would a wife comfort or serve anyone but her husband?" she asked simply.

"Wait a minute," he gasped, as realization dawned. "That isn't just a charming metaphor is it? They aren't just things ..."

"We never said that they were things. They are, as we told you, our daughters."

"But your children!" he cried in indignation. "How could you use them like that?"

"We live a very long time and value knowledge above all else. When we are young we serve an apprenticeship. To understand a thing you become a thing. To become a good master you must first serve."

"And the food?" he asked.

"We are born with our gifts; in serving so we also learn to use them." She smiled, remembering. "I too have served. We brought you only those who were willing to consider you as a master. You didn't choose them, young trader, they chose you."

"You cheated me!" he accused.

"Not so," she returned calmly. "You agreed to our terms."

"But I'm a Merchant. I purchased them to sell them; and now," he said sheepishly, "they won't let me."

"It seems to me, young man, that you don't know when you're well off. We traded you what we had to trade. You did very well in that transaction, I might add." He noticed suddenly that the quaint simple peasant woman seemed to have vanished. The woman he faced now was tall and perilously beautiful. "In return for a book you paid thirty pec for, you have received twenty-seven willing sorceress-maidens who will serve and comfort you until the end of your days, at which point their bond will be paid and they can return to us. You also still have

Artwork by Dameon Willich

most of your trade goods and a long trip home to use them. I think that we have done very well by you."

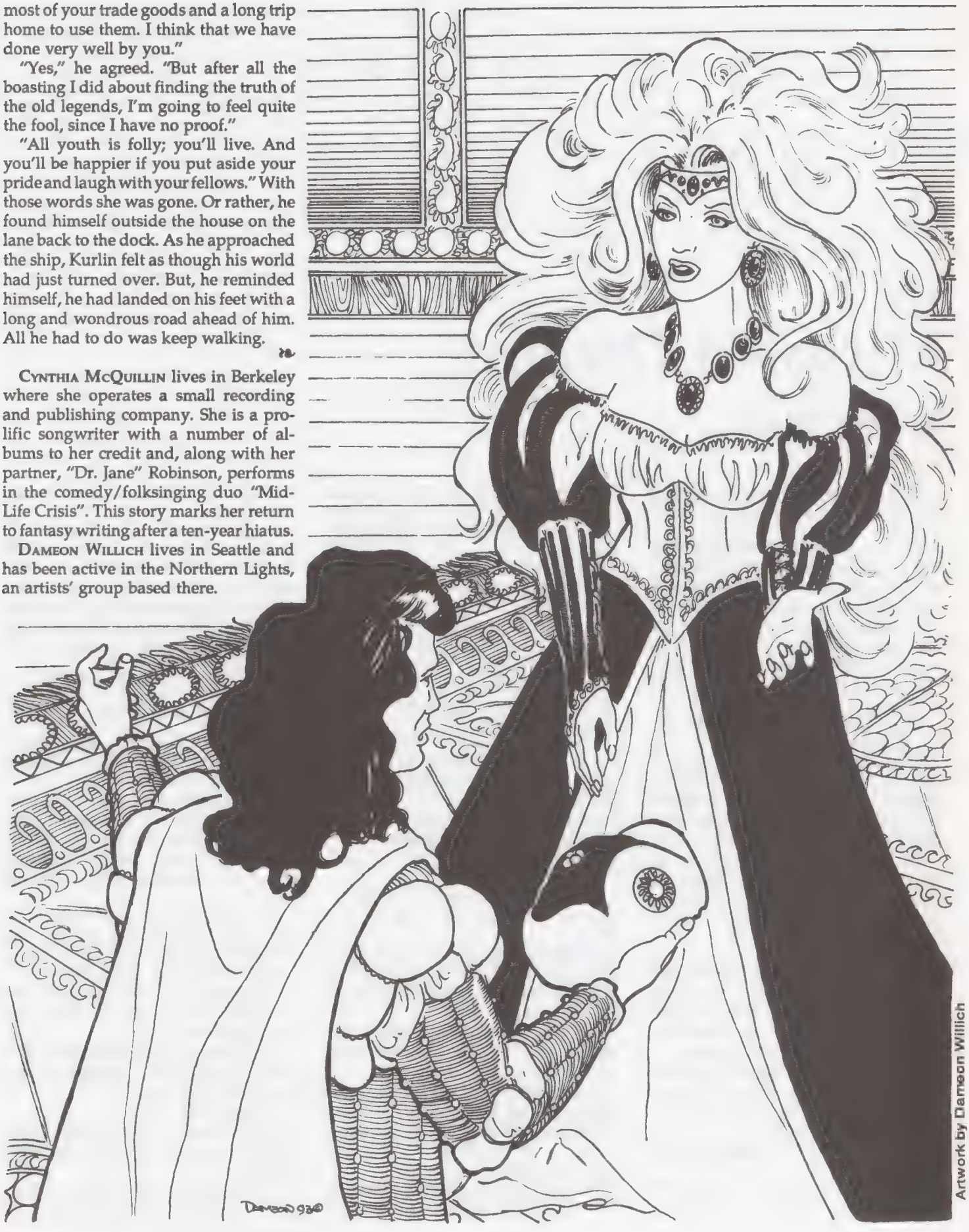
"Yes," he agreed. "But after all the boasting I did about finding the truth of the old legends, I'm going to feel quite the fool, since I have no proof."

"All youth is folly; you'll live. And you'll be happier if you put aside your pride and laugh with your fellows." With those words she was gone. Or rather, he found himself outside the house on the lane back to the dock. As he approached the ship, Kurlin felt as though his world had just turned over. But, he reminded himself, he had landed on his feet with a long and wondrous road ahead of him. All he had to do was keep walking.

❧

CYNTHIA MCQUILLIN lives in Berkeley where she operates a small recording and publishing company. She is a prolific songwriter with a number of albums to her credit and, along with her partner, "Dr. Jane" Robinson, performs in the comedy/folksinging duo "Mid-Life Crisis". This story marks her return to fantasy writing after a ten-year hiatus.

DAMEON WILLICH lives in Seattle and has been active in the Northern Lights, an artists' group based there.



Artwork by Dameon Willich

Mirrored Dreams

by Kathryn Lay

Darla glanced over the tables of worn clothing, chipped cups and ragged stuffed animals.

Shopping at yard sales with her mother was her favorite thing to do Saturday mornings. Her collection of brightly-colored figurines and jars came from such trips. And although she couldn't hear them, she especially enjoyed figurines that danced and twirled on music-boxes.

"If you don't see anything you like, I'm ready to go," her mother signed.

Darla nodded, wishing she could hear her mother's voice — just once.

The sun moved from its cloud cover as she walked past a small table. A kaleidoscope of colors jumped before her eyes.

She held her breath and picked up a round mirror, the size of her palm. Wrapped in borders of silver braiding, pieces of stained glass surrounded the beveled mirror. She had never seen so many colors at once, glistening wherever the sun kissed them.

"May I help you?"

The mirror almost slipped from Darla's hands. She stared at the red-haired woman behind the table. She must have imagined the voice — the unfamiliar words — for she had been born deaf.

Darla clutched the mirror. The colors dimmed as the sun slipped behind a cloud. Turning, she caught her mother's eye. "Please," she signed.

She watched her mother's lips ask, "How much?"

Darla's eyes moved to the red-haired woman's face.

Leaning forward, the woman smiled and spoke slowly, "It is an old mirror. You may have it, child. It is time for me to pass it on."

Darla signed, "Thank you," and hugged the mirror to her chest.

When they returned home, she ran across the yard, pausing only to wave at the cardinal that lived in the maple tree. In her room, she moved her glass collection to one side of her dresser and carefully placed the mirror nearest the window, where the sun shone in every morning.

Her fingers explored the colored glass — red, green, blue, amber, and purple — stopping when she felt something etched on the back.

Darla turned over the mirror. Her free hand signed the inscribed words. "A GIFT IS MOST CHERISHED ONCE SHARED."

She held the mirror near the window, anxious to see the colors sparkle and dance.

As the sun's rays hit the stained glass, Darla gasped. Sounds screamed in her ears. She wanted to shout for them to stop, there were so many.

"I can hear," she whispered. Her voice startled her. The words were strange. "Hello? Is that me speaking?"

She moved away from the window and danced around the sunlit room.

"I must tell Mama," she said, crossing to her bedroom door. Her footsteps clacked across the wooden floor.

But when she stepped away from the morning's light, silence returned. She spoke aloud, but felt only the vibrations of her voice.

Tears rolled down her cheeks. Why had her hearing come and gone? She stared at her tear-stained face in the mirror. Her reflection shimmered until a young woman wearing a golden crown appeared. Darla read her lips as the girl in the mirror spoke. "Take the mirror back into the light."

Darla ran to the window and held the mirror in the sunlight. Her hands trembled.

"Am I dreaming?" she asked. Again, sounds from the open window swept her away with excitement.

"No," the girl in the mirror said. "I am Kalaya. I was once a princess, but I ignored the needs of others. Now, within this mirror, I watch as the colored glass grants the dreams of those who need them."

Darla touched the mirror's smooth surface. She watched Kalaya's lips. The words were strange. Even Darla's words sounded mumbled. "I sound funny."

"As long as you hold the mirror, you will be understood and master the new words you hear."

"Say my name," Darla pleaded. "I'm Darla. Say it so I will understand when my mother calls me."

"Darla. Darla. Darla."

She laughed and stroked the mirror. "What wonderful magic! I can hear. I *can* hear!"

"For a time, until someone with a greater need comes," Kalaya said. "En-

Artwork by Bing Burnham

joy the gift, but do not forget the words carved on the back. And keep the sun's light on the colors to receive your gift."

The face faded, then disappeared.

Darla ran downstairs, cushioning the mirror in her jacket. For a moment, the joy fell away when she saw the note her mother left on the refrigerator door.

"I've taken some medicine to Mrs. Crandall's. I'll be home in an hour."

Darla walked outside and held the mirror toward the light. She looked up at the maple tree. The cardinal chattered and sang, and his song was beautiful.

"I'll go to the park," Darla shouted at a gray cat who meowed softly.

She ran down the hill to the playground. There were many wonderful sounds — laughter, squeaking swings, motorcycles zooming past. At first the sounds were jumbled together, like pieces of a puzzle. Slowly, she put each piece together until the pictures were complete.

She wanted to run and play with the others, but she feared breaking the mirror. Instead, she sat on a bench and listened until she thought she'd scream with delight.

"Hi."

Darla turned to see a girl in a wheelchair. "Hello."

"Do you live nearby?"

Darla nodded. "I live up the hill." Her hand signed the words as she'd always done before.

"You know sign language?" the girl asked. "I do too. It's a great way to pass secrets in school. My name is Stacy. Why aren't you playing?" She reached toward the mirror. "Oh, how pretty. Look at all the colors."

Darla jerked the mirror from Stacy's fingers.

"Mine!" she shouted. Heart pounding, she jumped from the bench and ran home.

"The gift must be passed on," a voice said.

Darla held the mirror out, her reflection again shifting until Kalaya's face stared back.

"Why?" Darla asked. "I want to keep the mirror forever."

The princess smiled, a sad smile that made Darla's stomach jump. "The mir-

ror can give joy to many. My selfishness brought me to this fate. I can only be released if others pass along the gift."

"But it isn't fair. I haven't had it very long," Darla screamed.

"Darla?"

She stopped. At last, she had heard her mother call her name. Her heart danced. She wanted to run to her mother, but Darla couldn't risk telling her of the gift. Kalaya might appear and reveal Darla's selfishness.

She stuffed the mirror inside her jacket, dousing the light's magic.

As if switched off, silence returned to her world.

Hurrying to the garage, she grabbed a shovel, searched for a soft spot of earth in the flower garden and dug a hole. After wrapping the mirror in an old towel, she placed it into the hole, covered it, then marked the spot with a gray rock.

That night she dreamed of people asking for one chance to walk, to see, or to leave their hospital beds. She dreamed of the joy she had felt while hearing.

When she woke the next morning, she thought about the red-haired woman who had smiled as she gave the mirror to Darla. What type of gift had the mirror granted her? How could she have presented it to a stranger?

Darla remembered when she gave a toy to a boy in a children's home at Christmas. She bought the plastic truck with money she had saved for months. When he smiled and hugged the truck, she felt wonderful.

A gift is most cherished once shared.

If the woman at the yard sale had hidden the mirror, Darla would never have heard dogs barking, cars zooming and children laughing. Most of all, she never would have heard her mother's voice.

"I'm going to the park," she signed to her mother.

Carefully, she dug up the mirror. Her hands shook as she unwrapped the gift. The colors danced and sparkled in the light. She waited for the princess to appear, but only saw her reflection.

The cardinal sang as she passed its nest.

Maybe the girl wouldn't be in the park again, she thought. But when she neared the playground, she saw Stacy sitting beside the same bench, watching the oth-

Artwork by Bing Burnham

ers play.

"Hi," Darla said.

Stacy looked up and smiled. "Hi. I'm glad you came back. I'm sorry if I upset you yesterday."

Darla sat on the bench, gripping the mirror. "Have you always been in a wheelchair?"

Stacy rubbed the arm of the chair. "I was in a car wreck when I was three." She pointed to the kids on the playground. "I'd love to play like that someday."

Darla stroked the mirror, straining to hear as many sounds as she could. Wind rustled the leaves of a nearby tree. A baby cried in a stroller. Above them, a helicopter whirred past.

Darla smiled. It had been a wonderful gift. And maybe, someday, someone would give her the mirror again.

"Here," she said, laying it in Stacy's lap. "It's a special gift."

Stacy stared at Darla. "But it belongs to you."

Darla watched Stacy's lips move, then signed, "No, it's everyone's."

She walked away, wiping the tears from her eyes. Standing under the maple tree, Darla searched for the cardinal. Its beak opened. She could still hear the song in her head.

❧

KATHRYN LAY's credits include over 180 short stories and articles, 32 writing awards and 2 picture books. "Mirrored Dreams" placed first in a recent competition of young adult short fiction. She lives in Bedford, Texas, with her husband and daughter.

BING BURNHAM received a BA in Painting and Illustration from Carnegie-Mellon in 1932. After a 25 year hiatus from 1936 to 1961, she began doing commercial work again. This is her first appearance in these pages.

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Interview with Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

by Rachel E. Holmen

I interviewed Nebula Award winner Elizabeth Ann Scarborough (Annie, to her friends) at her cheerful home near Seattle, Washington, right after NorWesCon [e.g., at the end of March, 1993]. After we said hello and I picked one of several comfortable chairs to sit in, the first thing I noticed was all her cats. Peaches was an old, diabetic orange cat. Throughout the interview, he walked around Annie making sure he got petted often enough. [Sadly, since the interview, Peaches has died.] On my lap sat Popsicle, a beautiful tortoiseshell calico; and Mustard, a very pretty cat with aqua eyes, was out on the porch where he had one ear turned back, listening to us and basking in the sun.

I'll send you this interview before it's published, so you can make sure I don't print anything erroneous.

Yeah. Or confidential. Usually anything you'd want to blackmail me for I'd brag about.

Right.

The readers will be interested in your background, and anyone who has read THE HEALER'S WAR knows you served as a nurse during the Viet Nam War. That first career interests me because it fits a theory I have about the lives of people who become writers. It seems to me that most of the writers I know came to writing after trying other things.

No, I always wanted to be a writer. But it was pointed out to me that I have the bad habit of liking to eat and liking to have money to spend and that these desires were just mutually incompatible with being a writer. I thought for a while when I first started my career that maybe that was false, but now I'm deciding that maybe it isn't. I'm sort of in it too deep to get out now.

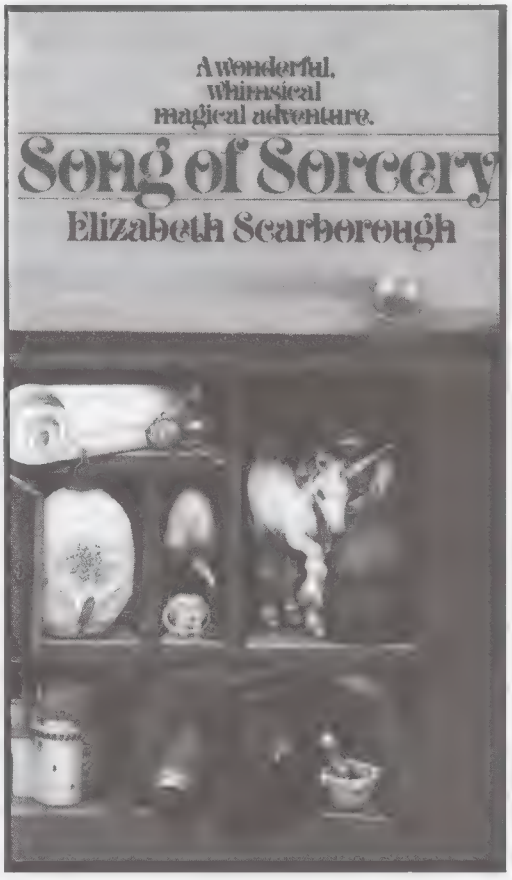
Where'd you go to college?

I went to the University of Alaska at Fairbanks.

What about nursing training?

That was in Kansas City, Kansas. That's where my mother graduated from also.

Carrying on a family tradition. Was she unhappy when you left nursing?



Well, she was afraid I wouldn't be able to make it in anything else. As a matter of fact, I probably could have made it in a lot of things. I'm from a very working-class family. My father was a telephone installer and my mother was a nurse, not a college-graduate nurse, a diploma-graduate nurse. Although she's very, very smart and an excellent nurse. She's retired now, but boy, she could think of things to make people comfortable before they even knew what it was that was bothering them. She's very, very talented. And Daddy repaired phones, from the time that you had to crank them up and ask for the operator until he was installing major computer phone systems for big corporations by the end of his career. I'm very, very proud of them.

Sound's like they're people to be proud of.

They actually know how to do things. My daddy's family were ranchers and farmers. My grandfather was a working cowboy. I have ancestors in the Texas history books. I feel really grounded in this country. There's an Indian side of the family and I'm extremely proud of that; that's a very strong connection for me. There's also Spanish in my family.

I think if more of us acknowledged all of our connections — I don't know if we'd treat each other better or not, but still it might get rid of a lot of this superiority-inferiority thing.

What about your writing, your working habits. Do you always just write in your office?

Oh, mostly I find it more comfortable to write in my office. I have a clipboard for taking galleys and bits of manuscript that have to be worked on — other people's manuscripts that I'm supposed to read — around because it's got a box under the clipboard. You can bring out a few pages to read and then stick them back down in the box and keep everything together that way. I've got a laptop computer but right now a friend is borrowing it to type up her book.

I just bought a brand new one from Dell. It's been a great thing to have. These brand new ones don't weigh much.

I think I'm going to take my laptop to John in Ireland, 'cause he's trying to get into folk music journalism. He's writing a book right now on Sandy Denny's life.

Oh, that'll be nice.

So you've had two or three careers. You were a military nurse for a while.

Yeah.

Were you writing as soon as you stopped that?

No, I kept on nursing for a while. But the military system burned me out on nursing, because it's a very authoritarian kind of nursing in a lot of ways and I don't handle authority well. I would make a good Nazi on certain days.

So did you muster out of the service in Viet Nam? Or afterward?

I was actually in the service for about another two or three years after that. I didn't mean to be, but my terminal assignment was going to be Fort Sam Houston at the Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio. But I hated it. I was damn near suicidal. Now I know I may have been slightly PTSD. Which they didn't know anything about at the time.

Post traumatic stress disorder.

Yes.

Wouldn't surprise me.

I had about three different car crashes, and I was also stressed by the situation I talked about in the book, with the guy that I had been in love with — who had kind of led me on — and I think he was probably just being kind, but as a matter of fact it wasn't kind. He's been on a guilt trip about it ever since that book came out.

You're still in touch with him?

Yeah. I'm a grown-up. But it hurt an awful lot at the time.

I liked Texas. I have a lot of friends in Texas. I'm very fond of Texans, but it was just that the post had a lot of high-ranking conservative people, you know, and so the military assignment wasn't good.

Then they sent me to Fort Wainwright in Alaska and I had a very understanding commanding officer who was very good to her nurses. In fact, she had my number right off; she made me the liaison to the Bob Hope troupe, in addition to my main job as a floor nurse at the hospital there. Later I was sent to Fort Greeley to be head nurse at the clinic. Fort Greeley was a hundred miles south of Fairbanks, and fairly isolated. So anyone who needed emergency hospitalization had to be medevacked to Fort Wainwright, and I flew with them. I was the only female officer in the compound a lot of times. Although there were other nurses there from time to time, most of them got sick in one way or another and had to leave. But it was a good assignment for me, because I really kind of needed to be away from the hierarchy in the military. And I got out of the military after that assignment.

But after you left the service, didn't you stay in Alaska?

No, I came back down and worked for about a year in Gallup, New Mexico, at the Gallup Indian Medical Center, and that was really interesting.

As a fantasy writer, you've written convincingly about other cultures, particularly the Asian cultures in THE HEALER'S WAR (Viet Nam) and NOTHING SACRED (Tibet). Was Gallup a cross-cultural experience?

I'm considering a cross-cultural experience something where you're really living with the people in the other culture. As a cross-cultural experience, New Mexico wasn't very intense. My patients were Indians, and so were some of my co-workers. In fact, I found out about Wounded Knee, the second time, from my Indian friends in Gallup, and it was different from anything you read in the press.

But Gallup was such an ugly town. It was a mean town. I did spend an awful lot of time when I was off duty up on the reservation, visiting and shopping and stuff like that.

Navaho? Hopi?

Navaho and Pueblo are the main people that we dealt with. The main large groups are Navaho, Zuni, and Hopi. There were also all different kinds of Pueblo people. And then I worked with mostly women from all kinds of different tribes: Cochiti, Navaho, Zuni, Choctaw, Flathead.

But I grew up in Kansas and there are a lot of Indian people

from the local tribes that lived around there that I went to school with and it was never any big deal for anybody.

Anyway, so you were in Gallup for about a year; what then?

Then I moved back to Texas and worked private duty for a while. I also worked briefly in a mental hospital which didn't work out.

I'd think that'd be very stressful.

It had been a long time since I'd been in training and the people weren't really very good about letting you know what they needed from you and it was just too vague.

So it wasn't the patients, it was the administrative set-up.

They wanted a medical nurse for a lot of things, but my job description wasn't really clear. And also the psychiatrist had a lot in common with most Nazis. About that time the guy that I'd been dating when I was in the service in Alaska wanted to get together, and so I went up there and we got married. We lived together in the woods for about seven years. I'd started going back to school and had started writing when we were living in the woods, after we got electricity. Later I got divorced and moved into Fairbanks.

You make a living in the woods just —

I made a living in the woods by driving fifteen miles into town in hairy, icy, snowy blizzard conditions, having my car die at the foot of the hill and the battery be dead by the time I dug it out, then having to lug the battery up the hill and thaw it out over the woodstove. By the time we got it reinstalled the car would be snowed in again. It was very scary. It was life-threatening. I do not recommend it to anybody, not the way we did it anyway. My husband was gone most of the time and it was miserable.

So were you trying to make a living in town?

My husband worked on the pipeline a lot of the time. I was working at minimum wage at J.C. Penney's all day — for which I had to dress up — but I couldn't even shower where we lived.

So you started writing.

Yeah.

What kinds of classes did you take at the University?

Oh, things that did me absolutely no good at first. I started out taking creative writing classes, mostly useless. For one thing they were taught by people who didn't know how to write anything but poetry, and that not nearly as well as they thought. It was mostly about their screwed-up love lives and wishful thinking about their sex lives. And they had class pets who would write little vignettes and then sneer at anybody who actually had a plot line. And I was Class Dissident.

At least you didn't give up.

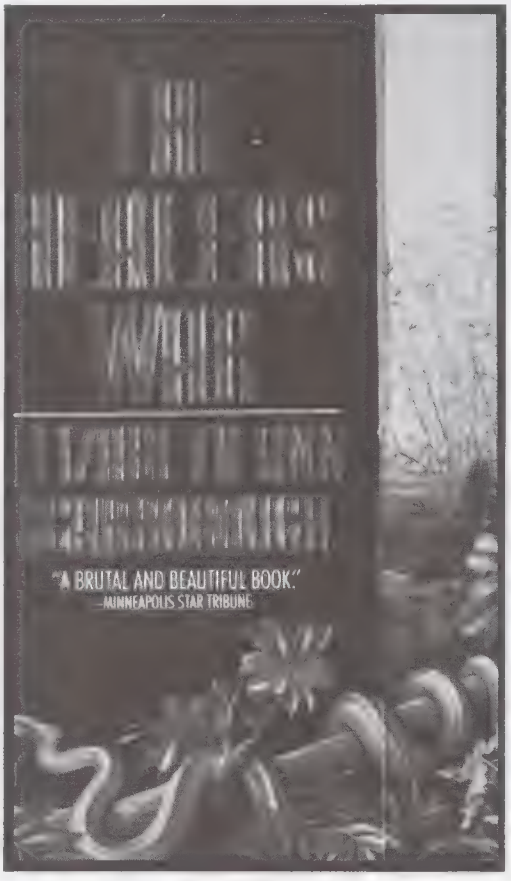
Well, no, it just made me mad enough to keep going. I decided they didn't know what in the hell they were talking about. By the time I started taking those classes I had already written a novel, which was more than any of them had done. I hadn't sold it yet at that point, but in the middle of the following semester I did sell it. And up to that time every time I held my hand up or said anything everybody kind of sneered at me, and then my IQ went up about 150 points after I sold my novel. My professors were asking me in the hall for the name of my agent and stuff like that. At that time I didn't even have an agent. How to write a query letter. All of the things that they should have known to begin with.

I have a feeling we go over that regularly at the conventions.

But of course I had never been to a convention at that time either. But I was reading Writer's Digest and that sort of thing, and I had taken the trouble to find out. Basically I didn't know how to do it, so I read a lot of books until I found out. And I got a lot of help from the journalism department, so my next major was journalism. But then I found out they needed about nine hours of work for every three hours worth of credit and I couldn't afford to do that and write and go to school full time and work part time to support myself, which is all the things that I was doing at the time.

You weren't getting alimony, I take it.

No. Well, actually, we didn't split up until about the end of the first semester. And I think my husband was real threatened by the fact that I was making straight A's and publishing a book.



In a community property state, he would have some claim on the work.

We decided he got to keep the house; I got to keep the book. If he tried to get the book, I would burn the house down. (Ann laughed.) We got joint custody of the cats. He did have to pay me some money for my half of the equity that we had built up together on the house. But he had built the house. It really was his house and I didn't want it. In fact I threatened not to leave him if he made me take the house, because I hated living out there. I liked my neighbors and it was pretty and there was a train that ran through the valley, but it was really scary.

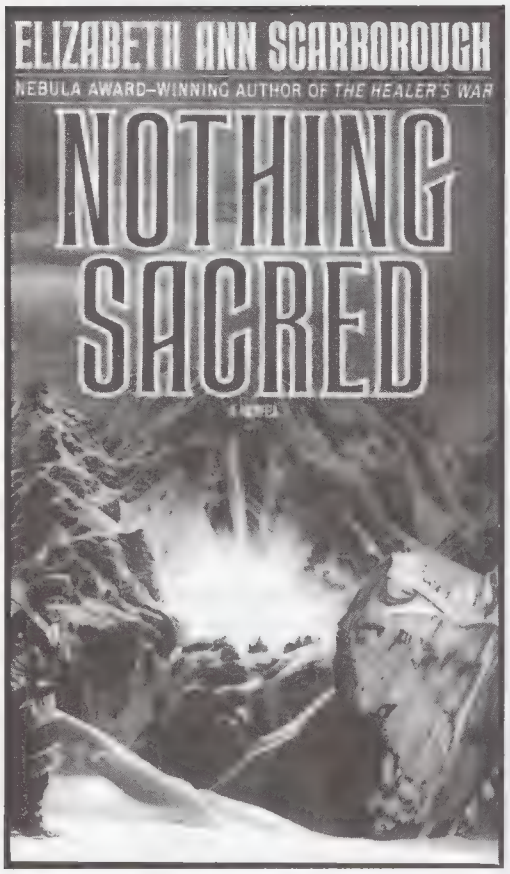
Yeah. My friend Mary Ann lived up in Alaska. She tells the same kind of stories you do. She and her husband lived on no money in the woods and it was just horrible. She was raising a baby!

Yeah, I wasn't raising a baby but it was pretty bad and he wasn't much help. But he's gotten remarried, and I hope that they're doing better than we did. But I did make good friends, and I did have a lot of help from them. That was the good part.

I do like more rural living. My husband was from New York City, basically. He didn't know how to do it. For instance, he didn't know how to hunt.

Was life in Alaska a cross-cultural experience?

Well, Alaska wasn't cross-cultural for me. Alaska was home. I mean, I just lived like an Alaskan. I lived in the woods without any water or electricity for seven years. The closest I had to real interaction that involved meeting people in their own home territory was when a girlfriend of mine married a fellow who was very important in his village, which was up on the Yukon. They flew me up to be her maid of honor. And so I went to the potlatch for their wedding and rode home — I rode down the



Yukon with his sisters in a river boat to the road and then caught a ride the rest of the way home.

In fact we used that potlatch in **POWERS THAT BE** for the latchkey ceremony, which is a cross between a potlatch and a ceili. [A ceili, pr. KAY-lee, is an Irish dance-and-music event. — Ed.] But it was Gabrielle's wedding potlatch that I was thinking of. And of course we added our own touches, songs and stuff; Annie and I both made up the songs.

So what was that first book that sold?

SONG OF SORCERY.

So, it made you the envy of all your classmates.

That's true.

A number of other books followed, mostly what I'd call "classic fantasy", in a made-up world, plus one set in Alaska (THE GOLDCAMP VAMPIRE). Then you wrote THE HEALER'S WAR, probably your best-known book to date, which won you a Nebula Award.

When you were in Viet Nam did you see much of the non-Americans?

Yes, I did. But I didn't live with them, I lived with the Army. And the Vietnamese people that I knew were our patients or our assistants, who worked with us under our own system of doing things. That was probably my longest cross-cultural experience, but in a way, because of the language barrier, it was harder to know as much about the culture [in Viet Nam] as you can find out in Ireland, because people do speak the same language even if it doesn't sound like it sometimes. As you probably gathered from **THE HEALER'S WAR**, about half my patients were Vietnamese, and they were much better at learning English than I was at learning Vietnamese. I did try, but I had no advance warning that I was going to Viet Nam, so I couldn't prepare. I had one rather snotty reader who wrote that he had gotten as far as the glossary in the front of my book and if that was all the Vietnamese that I knew, that was why America had lost the war in Viet Nam. He seemed to be holding me personally responsible for the whole thing. I felt like he was a) very ignorant and b) too cowardly to put his address on the letter so that I could write him back and tell him so. All the veterans who wrote said they loved it; I've had a lot more good feedback than bad feedback.

Certainly your descriptions of your patients, as filtered through the novel, are quite vivid.

I tried. And I do wonder what happened to them. I actually got closer to my Vietnamese patients in a lot of ways, than to many of the GIs. Some of them I was in contact with for six months, taking care of them every day.

I particularly remember the woman with skin grafts.

That was almost completely taken from real life.

To have her die at the end after being transferred from the hospital must have just broken your heart.

Oh, it really did, although I must say in all fairness, the way that incident really happened, I was not as confrontational with the doctor. I had no idea, actually, that she was really going to die, but she did. And I did try to talk him out of the transfer, but I wasn't quite as hysterical as I made it in the book. The doctor was appalled when he found out the consequences. He was not the bastard that the doctor was in the book, but it was necessary to have him that way for the sake of the story. The real doctor actually turned out to be a very nice man and was very conscientious and did care about the Vietnamese patients, but I think it was a shock to a lot of us when you got over there. We thought that we were going to be taking care of military personnel, and found out we were taking care of civilians and Vietnamese personnel instead.

I took care of Vietnamese patients more often than GI's, and because of that, I had a different understanding of the war.

I think your book healed a lot of rifts in the diverse sections in the science fiction community, between the left and the right politically.

Do you think so?

I had been basically very much opposed to the war.

I was opposed to the war. So were most of the people who were over there.

I had never felt I was opposed to the soldiers. Mostly they don't have much choice about their assignments.

Yeah. I on the other hand was not opposed to the war protesters. You know, I felt like, "Hey if you can stop it, go for it, man." We didn't know much about what we were getting into. And I'm not saying that everybody who was over there

wouldn't have gone had they known, but a lot of people wouldn't have. And a lot of people felt like they didn't have a lot of choice. People can get pretty pig-headed about what other people's options are.

I just feel that THE HEALER'S WAR opened up a lot of conversations that I think were very good.

I'm glad. I'm glad it had some effect. I just pretty much made a story out of what really happened. Some time I would like to get as much recognition from my fiction as I got from my semi-quasi-nonfiction! Part of it is fiction, but an awful lot of it isn't.

But it was so heart-felt. So vividly told. I mean, I remember the scene where the bombs are going off and you're lying there under the bed with the cockroaches.

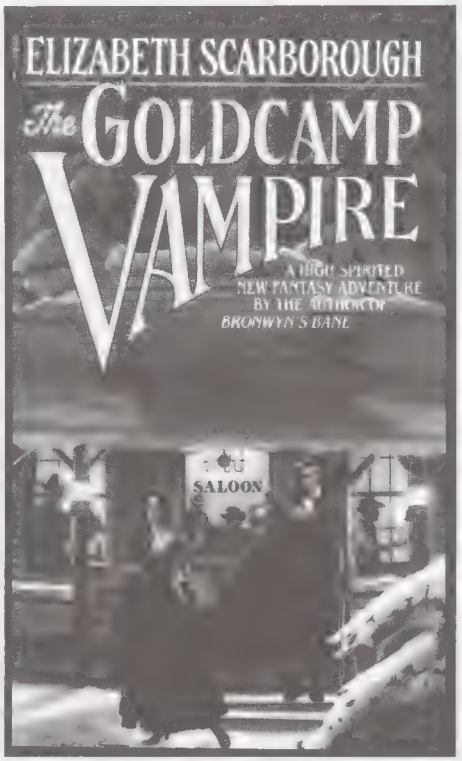
Oh, yeah. Hard to forget a scene like that. Oh, that happened all the time; that was just like normal. It's like, "Yeah, yeah, ok, if you're going to hit, hit. If not, I've got to go to sleep, okay? I've got to work in the morning."

And your description of it being a shock to see how beautiful it was. You think of it as a war zone, and then you realize, of course, that French Indochina was a resort. You did a great story-telling job.

I'm glad.

You made something very alien very vivid.

Well, for one thing, I had heard so many other women say, "Oh, I never could have done what you could." Well, yeah, you could have. I sure wasn't anybody special. I didn't even do an awfully good job. I just kind of muddled into it and muddled through it once I got there. It doesn't make you anything special that you've been through things. It may change you but it doesn't mean you were anybody special to begin with to do it.


ELIZABETH SCARBOROUGH
The GOLDCAMP VAMPIRE
A HIGH SPIRITED NEW FANTASY ADVENTURE BY THE AUTHOR OF BROKEN'S BANE
SALOON

Ann's home is filled with books, videotapes, cassettes, CDs, and musical instruments. (This *is* the home of the author of the "Songkiller Saga", about how the devil tries — but fails — to suppress folk music.) Like me, she is a real fan of folk music, and her knowledge and love of this field run through her books since SONG OF SORCERY. She's also a big fan of singer Bob Franke, and the two have met at his concerts. We talked more, and I learned that Bantam has published most of her books thus far (there's a complete listing of titles at the end of this interview). She recently signed contracts with Ballantine/Del Rey for some planned collaborations with Anne McCaffrey, and with Ace/Berkley for her solo novels.

At NorWesCon, Scarborough had done a reading from her most recently completed novel, POWERS THAT BE, written in collaboration with McCaffrey. The day before I was there, she had returned the corrected galley proofs to her publisher, and she was planning to leave a few days later for a four-month visit to Dragonhold, Anne McCaffrey's home in Ireland.

I said, So you'll be away for most of the summer. Are you going to spend most of that time visiting Annie [McCaffrey], or will you also travel around?

Well, mostly I'll base with Annie and we'll work on the book [POWERLINES by Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough, expected in 1994]. When the book is with me, she will work on her own book or do whatever she needs to do around there. And when it's with Anne I will either work on my own projects or I will sightsee. I do have a couple of trips planned right after I get there. One of which is a music friend of mine John O'Regan is running, or helping run, the Limerick Music Festival this year. So I will go with Tania Opland, a friend of mine, to stay at John's house during the festival and then come back up to Dublin and go to Annie's. Later I'll be going over to Girvan for the Girvan Folk Festival in Scotland, which I attended last year with John and was really, really fun.

You must miss the cats when you're gone so long.

I miss them a lot.

Does Annie have cats?

Yes, she does. But I don't talk about them too much around mine. But her cat Bronski, a little black and white devil, used to come in to greet me when I'd go in the bathroom in the morning. The sink's right beside the toilet, and he'd put his little heinie over the sink and take a leak along with me.

Will the new book have a different title when it's published in Britain?

No, it's got the same title, "Powers That Be". It's a collaboration between me and Annie. We did it together when I was staying at her house from January to May, 1992. And we made it up as we went along and it turned out, I think, terrific.

Certainly from the reading you did, it sounded great. I can still see the people and feel how cold it was.

Well, we wanted to do something that used Anne's trip to Alaska and my experience in Alaska for all those years, and of course that's very close to me. I can pull that experience out just like that. At one point I needed to know more technical stuff about dogsledding so that we could get our terms right, and I couldn't quite remember the braking system. That's when I called a friend in Fairbanks and she sent us over a couple of mushing magazines. Other friends sent research stuff that they thought was good about different stuff.

Is the new book a continuation of that book?

Yeah. These three books will all be with the same planet and the same characters and the same company. Those powers that be — there are several powers that be, but the main one is the company Intergal, that terraformed the planet and has terraformed and colonized other planets. The planet Petaybee — which is "p t b" or "powers that be" — was an arctic planet before it was terraformed. The land masses only formed at the poles, so the habitable area is all arctic. So the company moved in some of the "inconvenient people" from places on Earth where it wanted to upgrade the value of the real estate, and the present inhabitants were inconvenient.

You mean like deportation of Indians?

Like the deportation of, in this case, Eskimos and Irish, who are the people who live in Kilcoole and on the portion of Petaybee where our heroine Yana Maddock — her name is Yanaba which is a Navaho name that means "she meets the enemy". She is also half Irish, so her racial mix, and her service with the company and the fact that she has a disability, give her a legitimate reason [as a character] for being there. She's sent

there supposedly to recuperate, although they think she's going to die.

They threaten to withhold medical care that she needs unless she cooperates with them in spying on the people of the planet, because there have been some unauthorized things happening on the planet that they don't understand and they're very afraid because the location where she was injured was in a rebellion from another colony. The company in its infinite corporate wisdom has the habit of colonizing these places and not taking proper care of the colonists, and of being like a lot of big corporations, which are penny-wise and pound-foolish. They're spending a lot of money up front and then not following up.

Yana has a lung injury from a raid on a space station that was orbiting another colony planet. The colonists rebelled, raided the station and pumped gas in. Yana was teaching a class in which she was using a special kind of a mask [which saved her from the gas], and in trying to buddy-breathe with some of her students to save them, too, she took in some of the gas.

At first her injury is supposed to be terminal, but the people on the planet have found ways to use its resources and natural medicines that the company doesn't know about. The company doesn't really understand the planet or its resources, or the people who are there, who have changed quite a bit since they first settled. That's the background of the novel.

It sounds like the story really moves along, and it certainly was emotionally affecting to me, at your reading.

That's one thing that Annie can do really well that I really admire about her: she can cut right into the heart of the characters. I'm not saying that I can't, I'm just saying that she does this all the time and I don't.

There will be two more books in the same general setting, so you're going to make a trip to Ireland this year —

For the next couple of years.

That sounds like a marvellous opportunity.

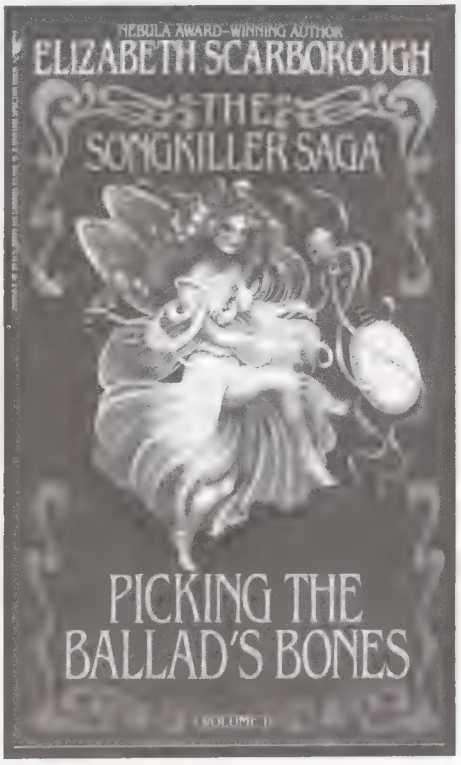
Yeah, it is. It's very interesting. It's my longest — except for Viet Nam — my longest cross-cultural experience, I think. And of course, again, I'm staying in a household at least run by Americans. But actually a lot of the business of the household is done by Irish people. Annie's secretary Jennie — she actually not just a secretary, she's actually her assistant and office manager and — I mean, it's nothing that formal: Jennie does the shopping, Jennie gets the video, Jennie does what needs doing and decides anything "papery". And then there's Cyra, who cleans the house so Annie can do her writing, and she's quite lovely. So the household is run pretty much in an Irish fashion but there's a lot more Americanisms in it than there would be in something that was Irish.

Well, I hope you have a wonderful time there. Thank you very much for talking to our readers.

Books by Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

SONG OF SORCERY (Bantam, 1982)
THE UNICORN CREED
BRONWYN'S BANE (Bantam, 1983)
THE HAREM OF AMAN AKBAR
THE CHRISTENING QUEST
THE DRASTIC DRAGONS OF DRACO, TEXAS
THE GOLDCAMP VAMPIRE (Bantam Spectra, 1987)
THE HEALER'S WAR (Doubleday, 1988)
NOTHING SACRED (Doubleday, 1991)
LAST REFUGE (Bantam, 1992)
THE SONGKILLER SAGA
BOOK 1: PHANTOM BANJO (Bantam Spectra, 1991)
BOOK 2: PICKING THE BALLAD'S BONES (Bantam Spectra, 1991)
BOOK 3: STRUM AGAIN? (Bantam Spectra, 1992)
THE GODMOTHER, Ace/Berkley, expected Sept. 94

in collaboration with Anne McCaffrey:
POWERS THAT BE, Ballantine/Del Rey, 1993.
POWERLINES, Ballantine/Del Rey, expected Aug. 94



Artwork by George Barr

Hand to Hand

by Nathan Long

Captain Lanchion parted the curtain and ducked under the low stone lintel of Ganna's place. He peered around the cluttered gloom and wrinkled his nose at the incense-spiced air. Ganna, a short, broad man, stripped to the waist, with hair thin on his head but thick on his arms and chest, and loose pantaloons tied high around his belly, stepped out of a back room and looked up at Lanchion.

"How may this one help the Great Captain?"

Lanchion looked down at him from his height. His face, made ugly by scars and weather and a thrice broken nose, scowled suspiciously at the little man.

"I am told you are a healer. That you can fix my hands."

"What is wrong with your hands?"

"They hurt."

"How do they hurt?"

Lanchion made an impatient gesture and instantly regretted it. His face went white with pain. "They ... ache," he hissed through clenched teeth. "They spasm, they cramp. My doctors give me powders and salves. The pain remains."

Ganna nodded. He motioned to a stool. "Please sit, Captain, and allow me to examine you."

Lanchion lowered himself stiffly onto the stool. He was careful that his spurs and sword did not stray in the chaos of bottles and books that surrounded him. Ganna nodded at the sword.

"May it be that you are sore from fighting?"

"I have wielded a sword since I was ten. I know that pain. That is not this."

Ganna sat opposite Lanchion and took his sword hand. He began to prod it and press it experimentally. Lanchion sucked in a sharp breath, but held his hand firm.

"When did this pain begin?" asked Ganna.

"Soon after we came to this cursed city."

"Perhaps then, it is some new thing that you do here that your hands are unaccustomed to doing. Tell me what you have done since you have come here."

Lanchion looked at him sharply. "Don't joke with me, old man. I am sure you know better than you would like what I have done here."

Ganna kept his eyes focused on Lanchion's hand. "I know what your people have done here, yes. But not you in particular. What have your duties and habits been since you arrived? Your words may reveal the cause of your pain, and it is much easier to find a cure once one knows a cause."

Lanchion eyed the shiny top of Ganna's head, as if contemplating the best way to split it. Finally he spoke.

"It is true, my duties are different now. But none of the work is ... hard."

He winced as Ganna spread his fingers.

"I have occupied cities before, under many commanders. It is an easy thing compared to battle. A chance for the men to rest and learn the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy.

"But my Lord Albain is not content with this. He says we must make an example of the people Kherrad, so that the rest of your country may fear us. I carry out his wishes.

"My Lord Albain commanded that all male children under a year be burnt. It was the task of my men to take the children. We fought weeping women. I never needed to close a fist.

"My Lord commanded that your elders watch as our soldiers defiled their daughters and wives. I held their heads so they could not look away. They were weak. It was no effort at all.

"My Lord commanded that we feed your priests the meat of your sacred animals. I held my sword to their necks while ..."

"Try to relax your hands."

Lanchion looked down, the veins of his hands writhed fitfully over his white knuckles. His muscles were knots. With a conscious effort of will, he relaxed his hands. His breath came shallow and rapid. He ground his lip.

"That is the pain," he gasped. "That is the pain you must stop!"

Ganna nodded and let go of Lanchion's hand. He seemed lost in thought.

"Well, healer? Can you cure me?"

Ganna sighed and turned his gaze to Lanchion's ill-used face.

"I think I know the cause of your pain, but as to a cure ..." He hesitated nervously. "I can give you some temporary relief, but the Great Captain will forgive me if I say that I am not the one to cure you."

"Then who is? Is there another in this god-forsaken town that can cure me?"

Ganna nodded. "There is." He swallowed. "You."

Lanchion glared at him, uncomprehending, then exploded. "Stop speaking in riddles, you Venni scum! I cannot bear this pain another day! What do you mean?"

"My most sincere apologies, Great Captain. I did not mean to confuse. I will endeavor to be more straightforward."

He took a deep breath and continued. "Your hands hurt you because you do not like what they are doing. Whether you allow yourself to think it or not, you are repulsed by the things you are commanded to do. The resulting tension rests in your hands."

"Ridiculous! I've killed hundreds of men."

"Hundreds of soldiers, Captain, on the field of battle. The field of honor. What you do now is not soldiering, but butchery."

Lanchion's dagger was at Ganna's throat. It shook. "This is no diagnosis! You try to poison my mind, to turn me from my duty."

Ganna gulped and held up his hands in surrender. "You are right, Captain. It was a blatant attempt to persuade you to stop killing my countrymen."

Lanchion's head sagged. The dagger faltered. "No, you are right. It is my lord Albain who is wrong. My job is not to kill old men and children, to torture women. It does nothing. It is ... pointless."

He sighed deeply. "But these are my orders."

Ganna eased himself away from the dagger's point. "I can see for you three courses of action. And know that they are no trick, for none of them benefits me or my people in the least."

Lanchion raised his head and lowered the dagger. He pressed his hands to his chest, flexing and twisting them in a vain effort to relieve his agony.

"They are?"

"One, do nothing. Go on as you have before and pray that your physician's powders and salves begin to work."

"Bah!"

"Two, leave the army."

Lanchion barked, the closest he ever came to a laugh. "Soldiering is all I know. Say another."

"Three, join another regiment. Return once more to the field. Leave to your Lord Albain the butchery he enjoys."

Lanchion sighed. "That too is impossible. Albain would never let me go. I do his work too well. There must be another way."

A wave of pain paled his face. He clenched his hands with all his might. "There must!"

Ganna reached for a jar of oil. "Come, Captain. Let me give your hands what relief I can. What I say is naught but speculation. Relax; put your mind at ease."

Lanchion let Ganna take his hand and begin to rub it with the scented oil. His hard face stared into the dark recesses of the shop. His mind worked.

A few days later, on his way home, as the city buzzed and cautiously rejoiced at the news of the mysterious and unexpected death of the cruel foreign general, Lord Albain, Ganna happened upon Captain Lanchion supervising a work party of soldiers and civilians, rebuilding a shop damaged in the recent siege. He approached the captain with a bow.

"Good day, Captain. How are your hands?"

Lanchion turned and looked the broad little man up and down. He flexed his fingers as if crushing someone's neck and raised the corner of his mouth a hair's width. "Better," he said, "much better." He returned his attention the work party.

Ganna bowed to the captain's back, then continued down the street, smiling. ❧

Nathan Long took the leap to full-time writer this year, thereby upgrading his guilt about not writing from a part-time to full-time occupation as well. He has sold his first screenplay recently and is now eagerly awaiting a chance to hear actors make a hash of his lines. This is his second sale to *FANTASY Magazine*.

George Barr has been a professional artist since 1960 and has been one of *FANTASY Magazine*'s favorite artists since our first issue (in fact, he's appeared in all but three of the issues). He has won a Hugo as Best Fan Artist and has been nominated in the Professional Artist category as well.

Artwork by George Barr

WINGS

When Elliot was thirteen years old, he started to grow wings. Not beautiful, feathery, angelic wings, either: Elliot's wings were spindly, membranous and pink. They were more like a bat's wings than anything else and Elliot thought they were truly repulsive. Adolescence was bad enough, Elliot thought, without something like this happening to a guy. It wasn't fair.

His parents gave him what moral support they could, but nothing like this had ever showed up in the family before (unless you counted Great-Uncle Albert, who was a hunchback) and, aside from assuring Elliot that they would continue to love him even if he took to wearing capes and sleeping in a coffin, there wasn't much else they could say.

Unfortunately this attempt to make light of Elliot's deformity only led to morbid imaginings on his part. He began to avoid going out on sunny days and demanded that his mother cook his meat to the consistency of leather lest he acquire a taste for blood.

Finally Elliot's parents took him to a doctor.

The doctor was fascinated by Elliot's wings.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured. He took one in his fingertips and stretched it out, admiring the delicate skeletal structure, the rosy color where the light shone through.

"You can open and close them at will?" he asked.

Elliot flexed his pectoral muscles and the wings snapped open with a pop, like an automatic umbrella.

"Extraordinary!" the doctor said again. Elliot blushed modestly and furled his wings. "Of course," said the doctor, "they aren't big enough to carry you yet."

"You mean they're going to grow?" Elliot was aghast.

"Why, of course," the doctor said reassuringly. He reached out as if he were going to pat Elliot on the back and patted him on the shoulder instead. "You're a growing boy. What did you expect?"

"I thought — I thought maybe you could make them go away."

"Amputate?" The doctor frowned.

"I — you don't know what it's like! I have to wear a jacket all the time! I hate it!"

The doctor thought of telling Elliot that he should be proud of his wings, but he was a careful man. Elliot had done nothing, after all, to earn his distinction: It had been visited upon him like a gift for music, or red hair.

"You should not," he finally temporized, "be ashamed. Some of us are born with beautiful faces. Some of us are born with extra fingers or vestigial tails. I am not even speaking of handicaps, you understand." He gave Elliot a long, steady look. "These wings of yours, they are not necessarily a liability."

"I hate them," Elliot repeated.

The doctor sighed.

When the doctor had finished examining Elliot he invited his parents into his office.

"I find nothing wrong with your son," he began.

"Nothing wrong!"

The doctor held up a hand for silence. "I mean he is physically healthy. His wings are certainly unusual, but they are not — not pathological. I believe the best course of action would be to encourage him to accept them."

"But — but he'll be *different!*"

"Yes, he will. He already is. Perhaps you should begin by asking yourselves why that seems so terrible to you."

Elliot's mother poked her husband. "Come on, Irving," she said, "let's get out of here."

And Elliot's father smiled apologetically at the doctor, shrugged, and escorted his wife from the office.

When Elliot entered high school the next year he got out of gym by telling the teacher that he had something wrong with his back. His wings showed under his clothing just enough to make his story plausible. He wasn't even asked to bring in a note from his doctor. In class he concealed his deformity by wearing a bulky sweater or a jacket, even when the weather was hot. And as the first weeks of the term passed without any questions being asked, Elliot finally began to believe that his secret was safe.

Now that he was more at ease about his wings, however, Elliot fell prey to a more ordinary teenage concern: He thought

Artwork by Gail Butler

by Barbara Rosen

his body was funny looking. He thought he looked like the 95-pound-weakling in the comic book ads.

For a while he lifted weights, but the only places he developed any muscles were around his shoulders and chest. The pectoral growth was particularly astonishing. To Elliot's bedazzled eyes his chest was beginning to look like the professional weight-lifters' chests in the body-building magazines. How it looked to others became painfully apparent when one of the kids in school yelled after him, "Hey, Elliot! When are you going to get a bra?"

When Elliot got home that afternoon he took a long look at his naked torso in the bathroom mirror, hid the weights in the back of his closet, and crawled into bed.

Meanwhile the wings continued to grow.

Sometimes when Elliot was alone in his room he would get undressed and spread them out to see how big they were getting. He was afraid that if they got much longer he wouldn't be able to hide them under a jacket any more. He'd be the only kid in high school to wear a trench coat all year round. No wonder Count Dracula wore a cape!

For a while Elliot read everything he could about vampires. His mother thought it was morbid, but the more he read, the more assured he became that he was not a vampire. Eventually he moved on to other forms of literature. He even resumed his old habit of filching bits of raw chop-meat when his mother was trying to cook.

"Cut that out!" she said, slapping at his hand. "I thought you'd outgrown that nonsense!"

But Elliot just laughed.

Oddly enough (especially since the doctor had actually mentioned the possibility) it never once crossed Elliot's mind that he might be able to fly. He was so used to thinking of his wings as a hideous deformity that it didn't occur to him that they might have a function. He never even flew in his dreams.

It took a near-accident to make Elliot put his wings to use.

Like most teenagers, he didn't like anybody messing around in his room. His parents respected his feelings up to a point, but, like that of most parents, their tolerance had a limit. Elliot's mother's limit was reached when she discovered fuzzy wads of dust hanging from the mouldings around the ceiling.

"Honestly!" she told Elliot, "For a minute there I thought you were growing Spanish moss!"

Elliot grunted.

"The cleaning woman is coming on Friday. If I don't see a big improvement before then, I'm sending her in there!"

"Aw, Mom!"

"'Aw, Mom' yourself. You heard me."

And so it was that Thursday afternoon found Elliot stripped to the waist in his room with a scrub bucket and the vacuum cleaner. He had just rinsed off the sponge and climbed back up on his bureau to continue washing the moulding when he lost his balance. He felt himself starting to fall, threw out his arms — and landed lightly on his feet on the other side of the room.

He looked around in confusion, automatically folding his wings. Funny, he didn't remember having opened them.

Lucky he'd landed the way he did. For a minute there he'd been sure he was going to break his neck. And how had he wound up way over here, anyway?

He walked over to his bed and sat brooding, all thought of cleaning forgotten. His room wasn't that big, true, but for him to have fallen *here* and come down *there* he'd have had to make a prodigious leap. And he hadn't even been *trying* to jump; he had fallen.

After a few minutes Elliot stood, snapped open his wings and climbed resolutely back onto the bureau.

Even before the appearance of his wings had forced him to give up sports, Elliot had never been an athletic child. In a way the wings were a good excuse to quit doing what he'd never been any good at to begin with.

Now, teetering on the edge of his bureau, Elliot thought the floor looked very far away. His mouth was dry, his hands were wet and his heart was beating so hard that he couldn't breathe. He flexed his shoulders and his wings curved, cupping the air.

Well, here goes, thought Elliot. And he closed his eyes and jumped.

He felt the air beneath his wings, buoying him up. His eyes opened just as he was about to crash into the opposite wall. Extending both arms to push himself away, he lost momentum and slithered to the floor in a heap.

I did it, he thought, panting with excitement; *I did it! I flew!* He rubbed his shin where he'd whacked it against the bookcase. *Got to try it again.* He looked wildly around. *Not enough room in here ...*

He still had almost an hour before his parents came home from work. The biggest continuous space in the apartment was the area between the front door and the opposite end of the living room; now Elliot busied himself moving furniture back against the walls and setting the lamps and knickknacks on the floor where he wouldn't knock them over with his wings. Then he positioned a chair at one end of his airway, climbed onto it, spread his wings and leaped.

He didn't go very far. About halfway across the living room he glided gently down. After a moment's confusion he realized that he'd been holding his wings rigidly open like a sail or a parachute; if he wanted to go any distance he'd have to flap them.

The next time he jumped off the chair he beat a mighty downstroke with his wings and almost brained himself on the ceiling. From there he came straight down with a jolt that made his teeth click.

Maybe starting from the chair wasn't such a good idea. He moved it out of the way with the other furniture, backed up against the front door and gave himself a good running start. He felt the air push backward against his wings, changed their angle until the push was *up* instead of *back* and beat down against the solid air. His running feet lifted off the floor. He began to sink, downstroked again and had to put out his arms to fend off the rapidly approaching wall.

Wow! thought Elliot. *Wow!*

He was sweating and out of breath. A quick glance at his watch told him that he just had time to set himself and the living room to rights before his parents arrived.

By the time they did, Elliot was back in his room washing down the moulding.

It never crossed Elliot's mind to tell his parents that he could fly. He had been ashamed of his wings from the moment they'd appeared. Finding that he could use them to flap his way across the living room didn't make them any less repulsive to him. On the contrary, discovering that his wings actually worked made him feel more abnormal than ever.

Nevertheless, Elliot's attitude toward his wings had changed. Given the opportunity to divest himself of them now, he would have refused.

After that astonishing afternoon of experimentation in the living room Elliot flew every chance he got. His opportunities were brief and few, however: the living room was out of bounds when his parents were around and he was almost always in school when they were at work. As he'd discovered the first day, his room was really too small. Besides, there was always the chance that one of them would open the door without knocking and catch him in the act.

The obvious place for further practice was the roof. Nobody ever went up there and there was plenty of unobstructed space. The trouble was, it was so cold. The very thought of stripping to the waist and exposing his skinny ribs and thin, unprotected wings to the frigid winter wind made Elliot break out in goose bumps.

So for the rest of that winter he was reduced to snatching an occasional half hour in the living room and casting longing glances at the air space in the gym at school.

Spring came.

By day the air was soft and damp; at night it turned chill. Green shoots began pushing up through the soil. Forsythias blazed like the burning bush.

On April Fool's Day Elliot told his parents he was going out for a walk after dinner, trotted down the stairs to the lobby, looked around to make sure nobody was watching him, and took the elevator to the top floor. From there he climbed the dusty flight of stairs that led to the roof, unlatched the door and stepped out under the night sky.

It was dark and quiet on the roof. Elliot glanced around, identifying the black bulk where the elevator housing was, the penciled silhouettes of aerials. He sighed. The long, black expanse of roof lay before him. Above there was only the cloudy city sky, redly reflecting light.

Elliot took off his jacket, his shirt. He stretched his arms toward the sky as if asking a benediction, flexed his pectorals and felt his wings blossom open behind him. "Here goes," he whispered. He began to run.

In three strides the roof dropped away beneath him. Elliot let his arms fall to his sides and concentrated on the angle and pulse of his wings. He shot over the parapet of the roof, tried to turn, lost altitude and panicked.

He wasn't worried about falling; he was worried about being forced to land on the street where somebody would see him.

Calm down, he told himself. *Stop hyperventilating, you idiot!*

His wings were beginning to tire. He managed to tilt his body to one side and bring himself around in a wide, swerving arc, but try as he might he couldn't gain altitude. He aimed for the side of the building, got as far as a fire escape and clung.

Braced against the cold metal he folded his wings and rested. After a few minutes he climbed quietly over the rail and tiptoed up the ladders from floor to floor until he reached the roof again.

God, it had been close. He pulled on his shirt and zipped his jacket, checking to make sure his keys were still in the pocket. He thought about being down in the street half-naked, wings exposed, without even a house key to let himself back in. The embarrassment! Oh, God. He sat huddled on the roof waiting for his legs to stop shaking. After a while he felt composed enough to go back downstairs and face his parents.

It was nearly a week before Elliot summoned the nerve to go up on the roof again. His chest and back were still sore from the last attempt, but at least his wings didn't feel stretched out of shape any more. Flying in the house had always been such an easy matter—a couple of strokes and then down — that it simply hadn't occurred to him that prolonged flight would be a strenuous and sweaty affair. Well, he thought grimly, he knew it now. Since that near-disastrous night he'd been preparing himself physically as well as mentally, opening and closing his wings, flapping while holding on to the windowsill (rather in the manner of a beginning swimmer learning to kick while hanging on to the edge of a pool) and doing calisthenics to improve his endurance. He even got the weights out of his closet again.

For his next excursion out on the roof Elliot planned a limited program of short flights from one side to the other; the last thing he wanted was to find himself shoot-

Artwork by Gail Butler

ing unexpectedly over the edge again. *Tonight,* he thought, *I'll practice my landings.* And that was what he did.

An hour later, pink with cold and exertion, he went back downstairs well satisfied with his night's work. *Slow and easy,* he told himself. *Not too much at once.* It was just like lifting weights.

Little by little Elliot learned the craft that went with his talent: how to turn, how to gain altitude, how to glide for long minutes on the warm updrafts above chimneys.

Before winter came again he stashed one of his old jackets on the roof, first cutting strategic holes in the back to let his folded wings through. He discovered that he could hover around chimneys when his wings got too cold, and warm up enough to fly a few minutes longer.

His parents never suspected his real reason for going out alone night after night. They knew he was solitary and probably lonely. His father, remembering his own more commonplace discoveries at Elliot's age, worried that he might grow up to be sexually maladjusted.

Once he made the mistake of mentioning the subject to Elliot.

"Most boys your age," he began, "they go out, they meet some girls ..."

"Yeah, sure," said Elliot; "I go out, I meet a girl ... What do I tell her? 'Don't hug me, you'll wrinkle my wings'?"

"I thought ..."

"Forget it," snapped Elliot. "Why can't you leave me alone?"

And his father did.

Actually, Elliot was all too aware of girls. His awareness and his wings had sprouted at almost the same time; all the shame and dismay he associated with his deformity had somehow gotten tangled up with the other things that were happening to his body. Later, when his wings had introduced him to the overwhelming joy of free flight, his discovery of sexual pleasure became, not another guilty secret, but part of the same one. Like his flying, it could never be shared.

If Elliot had been less of an introvert, he might have thought of exploiting his wings. He might have fantasized about joining a circus, flying through the criss-crossed beams of colored lights to the astonishment and envy of the audience below. Or he might have dreamed of modeling himself after Batman and dropping unexpectedly from above to seize criminals in their lairs. The glamour of fame would surely have brought him a gaggle of groupies longing to be embraced by a man with wings.

But fame was the last thing Elliot wanted. The thought was so repugnant to him that he never imagined anything resulting from public exposure but ridicule and contempt.

The years passed. Elliot graduated from high school and entered college.

His wings had reached their full size by now. From side to side their span was breathtaking, but fortunately they were still short enough to be concealed under a jacket when furled. Like a bat's wings, they folded up very small.

Having reached an age at which he could get a driver's license, he was able to escape to the countryside. He would take a sleeping bag and camp out in some high, isolated place. At dawn he'd launch himself into the sky and stay aloft until the first signs of human activity below warned him to conceal himself beneath the sheltering trees. He came home from these excursions refreshed; in the dawn sky, fully and freely himself, he forgot his perpetual isolation.

Except for his hunched profile, his disinclination to form close friendships, Elliot was not particularly noticeable. He did his classwork well but without distinction, was civil when spoken to but didn't initiate conversation. His peers quickly learned to ignore him and that was just what Elliot wanted.

When the time came, he got a job. It was a safe, quiet, office job, a job where he could put away a little money toward his retirement while living comfortably at home with his parents. Every two years he received a raise, but he neither expected nor was given a promotion. Nobody was envious of his position. Nobody paid any attention to him at all.

On his annual vacations, Elliot rented a camper and headed for the most remote places he could find. He stayed far away from scenic spots and national parks; he didn't much care about what was on the ground where he stopped anyway. All that mattered was that he remain unnoticed while in flight.

The great birds of prey in these desert places treated him as their equal. In their silent company he would ride the thermals for hours. His wings, stretched to their full span in the sunlight, cast a rosy shadow on the ground.

When his vacation time was over Elliot would put his jacket on again, drive back to the city and report to the office as usual. Except for the accumulated paperwork on his desk, it was as if he had never been away.

In this quiet way Elliot left his youth behind. Sometimes he thought of himself as a "Sunday flier", a sort of bizarre hobbyist. When he was in his thirties his mother died; a few years later his father followed. Middle age found him completely alone, beholden to no one.

He quit his job. He arranged with his bank to forward his savings and the money he had inherited to a bank in a small southwestern town. Then he bought a small house trailer, closed up the apartment where he had lived with his parents and left the city forever. When he arrived at his destination he stopped briefly in town to stock up on rice, beans, dried fruits, canned goods, and bottled water.

He parked the trailer several miles out of town, in the shadow of a sandstone cliff. He knew the cliff well from previous trips. Eagles nested there.

It was perfectly quiet in the desert. There was nothing to hear but the wind. As he had done so often on his vacations, Elliot stripped off his shirt and stood half-naked in the full light of the sun. He flexed his powerful chest muscles, feeling his wings expand behind him. The sunlight shone through them; it made them glow pink, like hands cupped around a flame.

Far above, so high as to be almost invisible, an eagle drifted.

Elliot ran across the desert floor, felt the air take his wings and mounted aloft to fly with the eagle.

That night he unpacked all the jackets he had worn during his years in the city and burned them in his campfire, one by one.

❧

Barbara Rosen is a former school teacher who has turned to writing. Flying is a dominant theme in her stories. In her spare time she does rescue work with stray animals.

Gail Butler is well-known in the Northwest as an artist and a fan. She is an ex-military-wife, musician, barber, and an antique restorer as well as an expert at drawing figures and animals. In her spare time she is a volunteer Jewish mother to Northwest art fandom.

Artwork by Vincent DiFate

LANDSCAPES

Michael D. Winkle

To the north — or what we have agreed to call north — are those strange melting watches and living geometric shapes. I do not go there. To the east is a nightmare land of bird-men, half-creatures, multi-headed things and even beasts with cart-wheels in place of legs. I visited there once, for I had been told it was a place of earthly delights. I fear I was lied to.

To the west are all those unicorns. They are all right, but those blasted hunters have come close to skewering me more than once.

South is the sea; perhaps I could embark on a voyage, but the horizon is full of ships that have struck reefs or burned; it is a veritable Sargasso out there.

So mostly I wander about the local landscape.

The farms are dreary, although there are many celebrations in the winter; the town is rather prosaic. It is full of noisy children. I do not know why there are so many children here, but I see them now and again carrying water, and playing ring-around-the-rosy, and peeking out from behind trees.

I took my afternoon tea at the Buxton Inn. I lingered a bit longer than usual, for I was daydreaming about the real world. Anne has occasionally told me of the wonders that have come to pass since I left: aeroplanes and motorcars and moving pictures. And God only knows how much time has passed since she came here.

I noticed the lateness of the hour; the lights from the Frames grew dim. I paid Mr. Buxton and hurried on my way.

I had tried to explore after dark my first few days here. I nearly ran headlong into one of the hideous walking corpses that rise from the earth in the night, seeking some mezzotint or voudou painting to climb through.

I took a narrow lane through the rolling meadows; the countryside is easy on the eye, I'll give it that. Pastures on my left; on my right a young forest. The leaves were scarlet and gold and umber, but they had not yet fallen.

Though I was somewhat in a hurry, I paused when I saw a curious figure jump through a Frame. It appeared to be a grey rabbit, but it ran upright like a human being. Its legs and arms were long and thin; its arms ended in white-gloved hands. It ran across the fields, then it followed the lane for a few hundreds of yards and dashed into the trees.

A short, pudgy man dressed in a dun-brown hunter's outfit climbed in through the same Frame the rabbit-creature had used. He glanced around momentarily, then he headed for the copse. He carried in his arms a huge, double-barreled shotgun. Despite the shortness of his legs, he

reached the trees in seconds and vanished as well.

I continued on my way, marveling at these odd beings who jumped through the Frames so easily. Once I saw a fat little mouse that also ran upright; it was followed by a large grey cat. They and the rabbit were not like real animals — more like caricatured portraits or fairy-tale beasts, of the Puss-in-Boots variety.

The Frames grew darker. I doubled my pace, ignoring the beauty of the lush green ferns and the golden grasses. I passed the lake that glinted so beautifully in the moonlight — if one dared stay out to observe it — and soon I reached the mansion.

"Richard, do you love me?" asked Anne.

"Of course, my darling," I replied.

I felt compelled to say this; I did not know what she could do if I claimed otherwise, but that circumstance has never arisen.

I kissed Anne and we sat at the table as we have times without counting. Maggie served *gigot farci en croute* and *gratin dauphinois*, accompanied by a fine, red Bordeaux. Excellent, as always.

We spoke about trifles, about the weather, and about new arrivals from beyond the Frames. Anne wanted to invite a couple over on Friday: Mr. and Mrs. Wilmarth. They had lingered too long in the Pickman Gallery at the Dunwich Art Museum, apparently. I told her I had no plans for Friday. I wondered how she distinguished one day from another.

After dinner we retired to the study. Anne worked as usual on her needlepoint, and I read a book that had come over some weeks or months back. It was called *Lost in the Funhouse* by someone named Barth. I scarcely understood a word of it.

Then we went to bed. Here I cannot slight Anne; she waited half a century for me, and she is just this side of insatiable.

I sat again outside the Buxton Inn, nursing a gin and tonic. A dapper gentleman in a beige afternoon suit, carrying a carpetbag, stepped up to my table.

"Good day to you, my dear fellow. May I join you?" he began.

I studied the stranger idly. His dress, from his high hat to his tan spats, indicated wealth, for whatever that means here. He seemed to be no more than twenty, but his narrow face held a cast that belied his age. He smiled cheerfully

Artwork by Vincent DiFate

enough, but there was a wrinkle at the corner of his mouth and a lowering eyebrow that betokened darkness behind his beaming countenance.

Still, I bade him sit, and sit he did.

"I've not seen you around before, Mr. —"

"Gray," he finished for me. "Dorian Gray. I am new to this part of the Landscape. I've been travelling this way from the east."

I gave him my name and then admitted astonishment.

"You came from the east? How did you avoid those demons and bird-men?"

Mr. Gray laughed.

"I did not. I found them rather amiable fellows. Birds of a feather, so to speak."

We conversed shortly, and Mr. Gray told me of the marvels he had seen elsewhere: lands mostly blue, or burnt umber, or garish yellow; living, walking inanimate objects, like something out of Lewis Carroll; cities in the air, men raining from the sky, re-enactments of Biblical miracles. Astonishing as it all was, I fear my attention wavered.

"... But I see, my fine fellow, that my Munchausian exploits are of little interest to you. Perhaps I should push on."

Mr. Gray made as if to rise; I bade him remain.

"I do not mean to be uncivil," I explained, "but I fear I've supped full of wonders. I'd rather be *out there*, in the real world, beyond the Frames."

Mr. Gray studied me with an amused expression, then he opened his bag and drew forth a large brown flask.

"Perhaps this may be of some help."

I looked at the label of the bottle and laughed.

"Good God! Where did you get *that*?"

"I've met an alchemist or two on my travels," explained Gray.

I leaned forward, touching the bottle delicately.

"What — what would it do?"

Gray shrugged.

"Haven't the foggiest. Never tried it, myself. I rather like it here. It might simply eradicate you — or burn an opening to the Outside."

We spoke of banalities, then Mr. Gray left, his bottle still on the table. I slipped it into my pocket as the afternoon wore on, then I headed home.

Anne's home, I reminded myself.

Anne greeted me with a loving kiss; often she acted the superior, since it was her doings that brought us here, but sometimes she forgot. I embraced her and kissed her in return, conscious of the hard glass in my pocket.

We had another fabulous dinner, and I wondered if I would ever eat so well Outside, where I would be a stranger in a strange land, my knowledge perhaps a century out of date.

We sat up in the study and talked; Anne spoke animatedly about our guests of tomorrow. I think she gets lonely for visitors. Perhaps I should make the acquaintance of more people of the Landscape.

We retired to our bed chamber, and we made love as though we had seen no one for a year. Would I find so willing a partner Out There?

I set the flask in my closet, behind my collection of hats. I do not know what would happen if I applied it to myself — or Anne. Would we be projected out of the Landscape? Would we simply cease to be? Could I pour it on the floor and burn a hole to the Outside? Or would I merely stain the carpet?

I do not know. Perhaps I shall never use it. But sometimes, when I'm feeling displeased with my lot, I push aside my hats and stare up at the single word on the brown bottle's label: TURPENTINE. ❧

MICHAEL D. WINKLE lives in Oklahoma and received a degree in English at Okalhoma State University. He has short stories published in places such as *Fantasy Book* and TALES OF THE WITCH WORLD 3. He likes to write about gryphons and werewolves, and has produced pastiches of everything from Jules Verne to Bullwinkle Moose.

VINCENT DI FATE received a Hugo as Best Professional Artist in 1979 as well as the Skylark and the Lensman Awards. He is regarded as one of the world's major illustrators of futuristic themes, including astronomical and aerospace themes for the National Geographic Society, CBS television, and NASA. He is a past president of ASFA and was the Artist Guest of Honor at the 1992 Worldcon.

Letters to the Editor

THE FIX IS IN

Kamila Miller, Portland, OR

The Spring 1993 issue was outstanding. "The Theban Fix" by Karen Anderson really stayed with me, maybe because the human was doing something, not following along as the Sphinx solved her problems for her. I hope to see Karen Anderson's work again.

We felt extremely fortunate to receive Mrs. Anderson's story, and we're glad you enjoyed it as much as we did! Personally, I think this story is of a caliber to receive a Hugo or Nebula nomination.— REH

SWEAR WORDS

Jan Combs, Wichita, KS

I just received issue #20 and read with interest your editorial on swearing. I agree whole-heartedly.

Swearing, cursing, blasphemy, scatology, etc. all have their uses, but using words inappropriately cheapens them. We should mourn when a very precise term looses its meaning. If one uses "fuck" to achieve imprecision, one might as well use "smurf", as in "Smurf a little smurf for me" or "Have a smurfy day".

Some writers seem to think that putting "dirty" words in a character's mouth shows either ethnicity or *machismo*. I object. Women and persons of non-Anglo ancestry are no more likely to use inappropriate terms under any condition. Ignorance and stupidity are the more likely reason for "cussin'" in public, private, or print.

This editorial seems to have struck a chord with a good number of our readers. We received several letters expressing enthusiastic agreement. — HRJ

BETTER THAN A SUBSCRIPTION

Darrell Schweitzer, Strafford, PA

I saw your letter [encouraging subscribers] in the *SFWA FORUM*. You know, I don't have a subscription. I have something better: a standing order for 10 copies of each issue, for resale. I re-order often. You've made a lot more off me than you'd get if I merely subscribed. So I think the solution is to encourage the contributors, especially the newer ones who have a stake in letting people know they've been published, to go forth and peddle the magazine. It's enlightened self-interest. It's also profitable. Maybe a "make money selling MZB's FM" flyer should go out to all contributors.

Darrell has sold over 300 copies to date. We are delighted when our authors choose this route of promoting both themselves and the magazine. We do, in fact, send the authors information about wholesale orders. — REH

OPINIONS

Greg Koster, Tacoma, WA

MZB's notions on the decline of swearing were fine. Without being too insistent, I would suggest that the rise of atheism has something to do with this as well. Logically, think how absurd it is for an atheist to cut loose with a "Godammit to hell!" when the hammer connects with a thumb. Thus, the atheist has to rely on obscenity, profanity being relegated to absurdity. This explains half of modern journalism, three quarters of modern art, and all of modern television. Of course when feelings get strong enough for swearing to come into play, logic generally goes out the window.

I think you're giving atheists more credit (and blame) than they deserve. And since I understand that church membership and attendance in this country are at an all-time high, it's hard to feel that atheism is on the rise.— REH

I seem to recall that MZB is the author of some collaborative works, with her brother, yet I didn't see them in her bib. I mention this because I have had several requests for MZB's works, and plan to forestall the next request with this bib. For the hard-core collector, such a bibliography will merely whet the appetite, leading to further harassment of the overworked reference librarian. For the other requestors, notably of the Darkover series, thank you so much for this tool.

The collaborations you are thinking of are, indeed, on the list, although not marked as collaborations (HUNTERS OF THE RED MOON and THE SURVIVORS). — HRJ

[Re:] suspension of disbelief: you are right in preaching this as the ideal. But in these days ... you wonder if the ideal is worth listening to. Why try for verisimilitude when you can rake in big bucks with artless lies that pretend to be the truth. The ideal has been inverted. Instead of suspending disbelief, the author insists this really happened, periodically putting in a disclaimer when the feeble libel laws get too close.

Growing Season

by Dorothy J. Heydt

The rains of three days back had filtered through the soil and left it in prime condition for weeding, neither dry enough to cling to the roots nor wet enough to cake underfoot into adobe brick. It was a pleasant morning besides, with thin clouds drifting in and out of the sun and the peach and apricot trees beginning to scatter petals over the earth. Keighley hummed bits of Handel as she knelt on the bank downhill from her house, where the driveway made a tight curve down to the road.

"Where'er you sit, the blushing flowers shall rise — "

Dig up the loose crumbly soil, sift out the long spiky fingers of the Bermuda grass, replant the oxalis with its little brown chickpea bulbs. Every year the grass moved in by three or four feet; every year she beat it back by five or six. Someday, if she lived long enough, it would go away for good.

"And all things flourish, where'er you turn your eyes — "

"Those are pretty flowers. What kind are they?"

The little girl stood on the edge of the road, where the Bermuda grass lashed and frothed against the asphalt, her shiny school shoes a cautious yard away from the fresh-turned earth. Marisela, that was her name, the youngest child of Keighley's next-but-one-uphill neighbor.

"They're oxalis," she said. "They're related to the ones you see all over the place, with the bright yellow flowers. 'Sour-flowers,' the kids call them."

"Oh, I know those. But these are prettier. They look like a plate in my grandmother's house, all blue and white."

"You're right." White and pale blue and edged with darker blue, they nodded in the light wind in the bank above Keighley's head, proper blue-willow china colors. "I like these colors too; I don't like yellow very much."

"Me neither. I like pink, though. If I had a garden, I'd have pink flowers in it. Do" (pronouncing carefully) "oxalis come in pink?"

Keighley turned to look at her, toes shuffling in the mud, knees and hip-joints complaining. The child was maybe six or seven: second grade, anyway. Her dark eyes sparkled, and she was wearing a dress the color of peach blossoms, probably new, probably handmade. It had pink ruffles on the shoulders and the young sun shone through them like the peach petals. "Pink oxalis? I don't know, but I can find out. I'll ask around. You'd better get going, you don't want to be late for school."

Marisela hurried on, and Keighley turned back to her work. The oxalis dipped and bobbed above her head. "Well, what do you think, guys?" she said. "You think some of you could grow in pink for Marisela? I could put you in a pot."

She did not expect the oxalis to answer her in words — for that matter, she had no reason to think they understood English. Their response to human whims was in their own idiom and on a slower scale.

She had run into them five or six years back, in a friend's garden down on the flats near the sea. The friend had taken the notion to plant a white garden, from white heather in the borders to white wisteria overhead. Then she'd taken ill for a season and couldn't do any weeding; the common yellow oxalis had invaded the borders. Before the gardener could regain her feet and take her trowel in hand, the oxalis had faded to a brilliant lavender-tinted white.

When Keighley had first seen them, the flowers had filled in all the spaces between the white azaleas and under the white roses. They bloomed in spring, died back in summer, and burst out in fall again when the rains came. The white oxalis left off and the neighbor's yellow oxalis began at the property line, which was not otherwise marked.

So Keighley, with her friend's blessing, had dug up a clump of white oxalis and planted them all over her downhill bank. By the following spring, as if they appreciated her confidence, they had come out in Keighley's favorite blue-and-white-china colors. It didn't seem unreasonable that they might turn pink for Marisela, if asked nicely.

Keighley was teasing out the brown bulbs from among the grass roots when she heard the squeal of tires downhill from her, where the road bent back along the mountain's side. A little later she heard sirens. Beginning to feel cold, she beat the dirt from her gloves and left her

little pile of bulbs on them by the roadside.

By the time she reached the spot, things were being tidied up. She saw black tire tracks on the dusty asphalt where a car had swerved suddenly, trying in vain to take that sudden turn by the school. Big chunks of green-and-yellow turf had been carved out of the bank. Uphill from the road, behind the schoolyard fence, white-lipped teachers were trying to keep the children away. Shrill playground whistles blew intermittently.

"That's Jeff Cooper's car," somebody said, "but that wasn't Jeff driving it. He was a white kid, light brown hair, black jacket."

"You didn't see his face?"

"I got just a glimpse of him. He took off downhill, running. *He* wasn't hurt any."

The car that had made the tracks had started over the hill on the other side, but had caught on a tree. Its rear wheels and fender rested on the grass verge. The paramedics had their ambulance doors open and were lifting a blanket-covered stretcher with a little ruffle of peach-blossom pink visible on one side. Keighley shut her eyes.

A burst of static, and the distorted sound of a radio speaker. "That checks out. Dr. Cooper called in this morning to report the car stolen. Before eight A.M., that was — "

"Who's going to tell the parents? I don't even know them — "

"Get Father Carey to tell them. Isn't that sort of thing his job ...?"

Keighley went back uphill, found a suitable pot, and planted her bulbs.

By the day of the funeral, at the end of the week, the police had made no progress in finding the driver of the stolen car. Fingerprints taken from the steering wheel found no match in the database.

"This is hard for us — " Father Carey said, and stopped, and swallowed. Keighley pulled out her third handkerchief. Marisela's family were crying, up there in the front pews, but they had a right to; Keighley, who had been known to weep at everything from *THE SEVENTH SEAL* to *THE TENTH GOOD THING ABOUT BARNEY*, sat in the back behind a pillar so as not to be an embarrassment to anybody.

"This is hard for us," Father Carey repeated. "Not for Marisela. If anything, we should envy her. All of us want to go to Heaven someday. Marisela has gotten there ahead of us." Keighley blew her nose, quietly, behind her pillar.

At the graveside she found a tree to stand behind, a sturdy scrub oak just beginning to put out its new leaves. She sat there after the rest of the people had left, her back against the tree, scribbling in a little notebook for a story with a deadline on the 15th, and waited till the gardeners had come and gone. They had covered the small grave with strips of sod, neatly trimmed and fitted. Keighley opened her bag and got out her smallest trowel and a carefully-wrapped baggie full of little sprouts. She eased them gently into all the seams of the turf and sneaked away without being seen.

Driving back, she saw that someone had replaced the turves on the bank by the schoolyard, and the common yellow oxalis were showing as much cheer as you could expect of them under the circumstances. If it didn't rain in the next day or so, she'd haul down a few buckets and give them a drink.

It didn't rain till Sunday night, and then it thundered far out to sea for a long time before the rain moved in. Keighley, high in her sleeping loft under the roof, heard the big drops beating on the shingles and turned over, thinking that now she could rest.

Artwork by Sandra Templeton

Instead she dreamed of the turn in the road just before the school, where Jeff Cooper had had his car towed away and the grass was growing in, black under a red moon. The bells of oxalis tossed in the wild wind. She was walking, or trying to walk, her feet trailing along the ground: step, and drag the other foot to meet it, step, and drag again, like the basse dances they taught at the local branch of the SCA. Step; slide. The ground sloped beneath her feet. Someone cried out, words of warning or mourning she couldn't make out. She was sliding downward, down into the dark.

She woke into perfect silence, the storm having passed over her into the Valley, and only then, as usual with bad dreams, her heart began to race and the breath to catch in her throat. She lay still in the tangled bed, forcing her lungs to draw in slow deep breaths, four counts in, four out, till her heart quieted. It was only then that she thought to ask the dream, *Who are you?* But it only answered, *I am Retribution,* and she could have told it that herself.

But a little later it dawned on her that, also after the manner of dreams, the figure stumbling and sliding under the red moon, feet dragging along the ground, had been not herself but somebody else.

The following night, though the wind was calm and the sky clear, with the young moon floating like a magnolia petal on a lake, she had the same dream again. A tall dark shape with sliding feet, hop-pole slender and graceful with youth, went ahead of her under inky trees and a moon like an open eye. She followed, three or four paces behind, dancing his dance. He never stopped; she never caught up to him. The ground sloped under their feet; the scarlet oxalis clung to their ankles. It would not let them plunge headlong; it would not let them escape; slowly they spiraled widdershins into suffocating darkness. Keighley woke gasping for air, her mind full of unpleasant images of drains, sewer rats, foul things flushed out of sight —

"And plumber's bills, no doubt," she said aloud, flinging open the window and stepping out onto the tiny deck. She stood there, letting the morning sun dazzle her eyes and the wind blow her hair about like flapping grey goose wings, till they blew the images out of her mind and she could go downstairs without shuddering.

This went on for most of another week. By day she finished her story and sent it out to meet its deadline, coped with an invasion of ants in the kitchen, fed the cat and washed the dishes, and dug the Bermuda grass out of another yard of her bank. By night she traced a slow basse dance under the wind while the oxalis danced the wild galliard.

By the third morning or so she realized why the dream was so frightening — not counting that she was obviously trailing the kid who'd driven the car. One of the basse dances she'd learned in that class had come out of the plague years: the Dance of Death. Slip and slide, your face averted from your partner's: up and down, hands linked, faces turned away till the very end. Reprise: out to arms' length, turned away; reprise: gather your partner in, turn inward to see that he wears the mask of Death. And so do you.

The day she went down to mail off her story, her next-but-one-downhill neighbor trapped her in the slow post office line with a clipboard. "This one you *will* want to sign," she said.

"That's what you always say, Carla — but this time you're right," Keighley conceded. It was a petition to bring a motion before the City Council to put reflective barriers along a certain curve in Las Casas Road — described in terms of land parcels and survey coordinates, but she could guess which curve they meant. She pulled out the ballpoint pen that rode the knot in her hair, and signed.

"I suppose they still don't know who was driving the car?"

"They haven't a clue — though the official reports phrase it a little more elegantly." Carla had been born about ten years too early for a policewoman's career to be feasible; instead she ran petitions and drives, badgered the Council pro- and anti- as required, and sat in on

Artwork by Sandra Templeton

the dispatcher's desk when the regular girl was sick. What she didn't know, the cops didn't know either. "Nobody saw the kid's, so-called, face. He could be any age from twelve to forty. Assuming he really was a joyriding teenager, this only narrows it down to several thousand in this county alone. Thanks, Keighley; I'll let you know if anybody does find out anything." She moved on with her clipboard to the next man in line, leaving Keighley to ponder.

She was saved at least the dilemma of whether to try to tell Carla about her nightly visions. She had never seen the kid's face; had no real information (however strangely acquired) to give, so that there was no point trying to convince anyone that what she had seen was true. If it was.

It wasn't hard to feel sorry for the kid, whoever he was. Leaving his other sins to one side, he certainly hadn't planned to go out on a fine spring morning and rub out a child. Given her druthers, Keighley would not have compounded his burdens by trailing after him like a bony grey old Nemesis every night. But she had been gifted with the job and presumably must do it.

He was trying to go somewhere — no, trying to get away from something, but the plants brushed across his ankles, caught at his feet. It was only when he turned his back to the wind that she saw that they were taking him somewhere, guiding his feet with endless soft strokes of their long stems tipped with flowers the color of blood. Leading him where he feared and longed to go, a place that had the taste of release, the dimensions of finality. But he turned away, and the ground knelt under him, the flowers curtseying as the bank collapsed, Keighley backpedaling frantically to keep from following him. And someone was calling out, crying and beseeching, and Keighley sat upright in bed cursing.

Enough was enough. Keighley was in any case too old to go out dancing every night with young men she didn't know. Her shoulders sagged with fatigue and her eyes felt like sandpaper. If she couldn't catch up with him, maybe she could get a head start on him. She had been going to bed earlier each night, but apparently her partner had too. She could imagine him, sleeping long hours, trying to escape the memories of the day, raiding his mom's medicine chest for sleeping pills — but escaping only into the dance.

Keighley was a day person by nature, who had never been able to sleep before the sun went down. She went into town and bought an eyeshade and a pair of earplugs and a packet of chamomile tea. This, when she brewed it, tasted sicky-sweet and she couldn't drink it, so she ate a lot of salad for dinner — lettuce was supposed to be a soporific, all the old herbals said so.

Black out the fading sunlight; plug out the birdsong and the occasional whisper of tires along the road below. She had made up her bed with fresh sheets and put on her favorite nightshirt, the faded green one with rips under both arms. Still she found it hard to sleep. It was too warm, and then it was too cold, and she twisted back and forth with sweat oozing damply out from under her scalp and down her back. Her mind wandered from its purpose, and she thought of gardening and new kitchen flooring and planting catnip and then she was going out the kitchen door to bury the dead salad under the compost. The oxalis waved in the wind before her.

But that's right, she thought with a burst of enlightenment. *You can't go through oxalis, the stems are always tangled together. You have to go over it or under it.* She leapt off the doorstep and glided over the heart-shaped leaves, the flowers swirling like foam in her wake. She bounded downhill in twenty-foot strides, lighter in heart than she had been in years, no, days. Hurrying to the dance. Her partner waiting below, a ballroom floored and walled with blossoms. Tall and lean in black, a cluster of crimson orchids over his heart, an Oedipus face weeping black blood drops as he turned and began to drift downhill. Keighley threw away everything they'd ever told her about its being unladylike to lead, and seized him by both hands and pulled.

Slowly she drew him uphill. There must be a crest to this hill, a flat place where they could rest and she could give the kid a piece of her mind. But before they could get there he stopped, mouth open in astonishment, eyes staring through their crusted rims. He wasn't looking at Keighley. She turned around.

Seated above her head on a green bank starred with white, a woman sat with something in her hands, something in her lap. A woman she knew, a neighbor, murmuring, *"Ave, Maria, llena de gracia, el Señor es contigo ..."*

Pale light streamed down on her from overhead, and in her lap something stirred, a shape hard to define, lifting a hand to touch the beads as they went by, shining with light as clear as the sun through peach blossoms.

This isn't my dream at all, she thought, suddenly lucid. *This isn't the kid's dream either. It's Marisela's mother who's dreaming — unless it's Marisela.* She looked higher. The woman with the child in her lap was seated in the lap of another, a giantess in a flowing robe, with the pale clear moonlight all around her. Later on Keighley recognized her as the Virgin of the Pietà, the monumental marble Virgin who would be nine feet tall if she stood up, big enough to cradle a grown man in her lap, with a face that had gone through sorrow and come out on the other side. Light poured down like water over mother and daughter, flooding everything, washing the blood-red flowers white, washing the ground out from under them. Instead of slipping and falling, they began to float, and the roots of the oxalis sucked up the light and they flowered in a blaze of light too splendid to see.

Keighley didn't wake, but drifted away into other dreams that she could never remember afterward except in fragments: a cup, and a sword, and a green hill, and dawn breaking over the sea.

Back in the real world, she had just stepped into the shower when the phone rang. She wrapped a towel around most of the parts that counted, and left a trail of damp footprints to her desk.

"Keighley, guess what," Carla said. "The kid — "

"Turned himself in this morning," Keighley finished.

"How the hell do you know?"

"I dreamed it," Keighley said sweetly. "Hey — have I lost my grip on the calendar, or did they have a City Council meeting last night? Did they approve the traffic markers?"

"They did," Carla said. "Of course, they can't get to it till they finish the Drake's Landing overpass and the new traffic light on State Street. It'll be summer by the time they get it done."

"And school will be out. Oh, well. I hope they go easy on the kid. He's done a whole lot of repenting already."

"What the hell? You do know something about this — "

"Nothing you can use in court, so don't inquire me. Tell the D.A. it's all hearsay." She said good-bye and padded back to her shower.

Three white oxalis had seeded by the front doorstep, in a line for the carport, and this reminded her. She drove down Las Casas, musing on the power of dreams — or maybe it was the power of

faith, or perhaps you should say the power of imagination — and the turn was in front of her almost before she knew it. A sheet of brilliant white suddenly blazed up before her, not bright enough to blind her, but enough to yank the wheel hard around and bring her around the turn with tires screeching. She found herself straight on the level stretch of road below the school, and she pulled into the parking lot and sat there till her hands stopped shaking. Then she walked back up the hill.

She had thought the flowers on her bank were white; these shone like the candidate's toga, brilliant with fuller's earth. Larger than usual, almost too heavy to move in the wind, they clustered thickly on the slope around the turn, their shining bells pointed towards ongoing traffic.

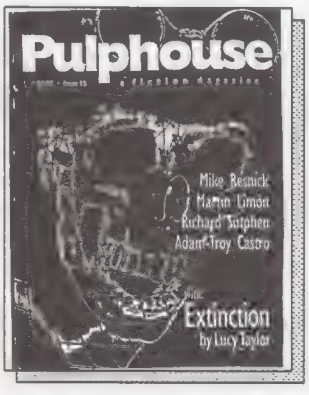
They wouldn't last, of course. When summer came they'd dry up and disappear, leaving only the little brown bulbs hidden in the earth. But of course by then school would be out and the barriers built. Keighley walked back to her car and drove down Las Casas, over the Arroyo Pequeño bridge to the churchyard, to watch Marisela's flowers dance pink under the morning sun.

❧

DOROTHY J. HEYDT also dislikes yellow ... and the oxalis that sprout in her garden every spring are white, changing to yellow at the property line. No kidding. There are white violets, too, and the California poppies have faded to a deep cream color. Either "Growing Season" is more fact than fantasy, or whoever had the garden before had similar tastes — or a time machine.

SANDRA TEMPLETON lives near Kansas City with her husband and teenage daughter. Her artistic credits are varied, including work as a courtroom illustrator for a TV station, package design, and advertising. She is a member of the New York Society of Illustrators.

Artwork by Sandra Templeton



Pulphouse
a fiction magazine

1992 HUGO AWARD NOMINEE!

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The Last Word

I'd be interested in hearing from our readers about the art history references in "Landscapes", and we'll put the best replies in the Letters column next time.

Tanya Huff's story provoked a mad (and ultimately fruitless) search for a photo of a 1966 Ford Galaxy. Turns out she had gotten the details about the car (which are accurate, she claims) from a neighbor who was a serious car buff. But it never occurred to her that we'd want to see what the car actually *looked* like! And Tanya had moved since the story was submitted, so it took a while just to track her down.

Some of the artwork in this issue was perhaps a little more experimental than normal, but I've been hoping for a subject that suited Richard Powers' artwork since I first started working here. Next issue we hope to have contributions by Alicia Austin, Rob Alexander, and others of our talented "regulars".

We have cover stories coming up in future issues by Jo Clayton and Phyllis Ann Karr; and Mercedes Lackey has promised to write a cover story for us soon. Marion is away on a wonderful trip, the "Magical Britain" tour, and I'm sure she'll come back with inspiration for several new novels. She has a busy travel schedule planned for this fall, all inside the U.S., and is feeling quite well.

We have extended the deadline for the bookmark contest to March 30, 1994, in order to give us more time to notify ASFA and other artists' groups about the contest.

Due to some travelling of my own, a lot of this issue was pulled together by Art Weller and Heather Rose Jones, aided by some last-minute proofreading by Debbie Notkin. Thanks, team!

In an effort to increase our circulation, I attended the San Diego ComicCon this August. Thanks to the Small Press coordinator, Bill Stoddard, we had a half-table in a special area, and I spoke on two panels, one about cover art (with Michael Whelan as a fellow panelist) and one about breaking into print, where we dragged George Clayton Johnson out of the audience to join me, Daryl Mallett, and Kevin Murphy for a freewheeling look at the life of a would-be writer. (George hasn't published a lot of novels, but he did write LOGAN'S RUN.) We had a lot of fun, and I think the audience did, too.

Approximately 30,000 people attended the con — they ran out of that many program books the first day, an hour after opening — and it seemed at times that all of them came by our dealer table at least twice to look at the magazine and try and decide if *FANTASY Magazine* was really a comic or not. I finally started displaying one copy open on the table — look, WORDS! TYPE, even! Plus terrific art, of course. But even in the most unfamiliar surroundings, Marion has her loyal fans, and I appreciated all of them who came by to say hello and admire what she's doing with the magazine.

I took my eleven-year-old nephew with me to San Diego — he's a talented comics artist in his own right and I fully expect he'll be published while still in his teens — and both of us agreed that the *FOOTROT FLATS* animated feature film was our favorite part of the convention. *FOOTROT FLATS* is a comic strip from New Zealand, about life on a sheep ranch from the dog's point of view. While the humor is occasionally crude, it's also very amusing and good-hearted. The feature film was a delightful romp as the good guys (led by Wal, the dog's owner) undertake to rescue stolen animals and fight their evil next-door neighbors, and further a little canine romance along the way. I have never seen the daily comic strip, only a few books, but I was pleased to see Charles Schultz' commendation on the newest book; maybe more Americans will take his advice and become familiar with Snoopy's pal from down under.

Two weeks later was ConFrancisco — nearly 10,000 fans. Thanks again to everyone who stopped to say hello.

— *Rachel E. Holmen*

Is Adult Fantasy Just Plain Silly?

One of our biggest problems is persuading people that Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* is for adults and yet is nothing to be ashamed of. Somehow the term "adult fantasy" has acquired a bad reputation. But we're not for children, particularly, though we do prefer to avoid strong language. And if we say our stories are about elves, dragons, and fairy princesses, people think we're silly.

Yet fantasy has been described as the fiction of moral choices, and every good story hinges on its characters' decisions between compelling alternatives.

Entertainment that's not mindless — this is our offer to you. Literate but not boring. A class act.

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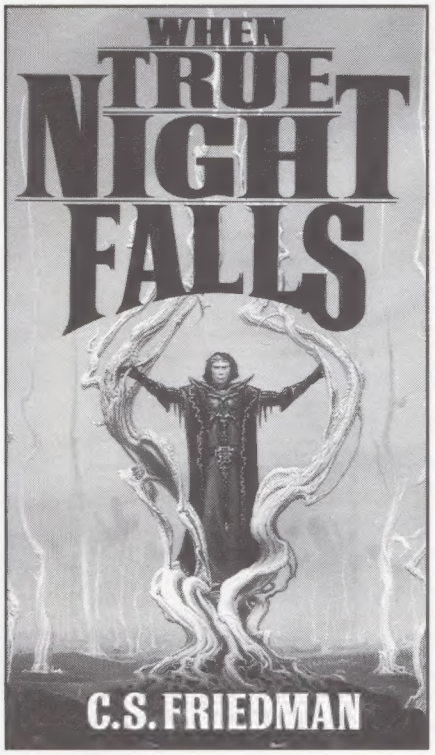

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[Coldfire #2]
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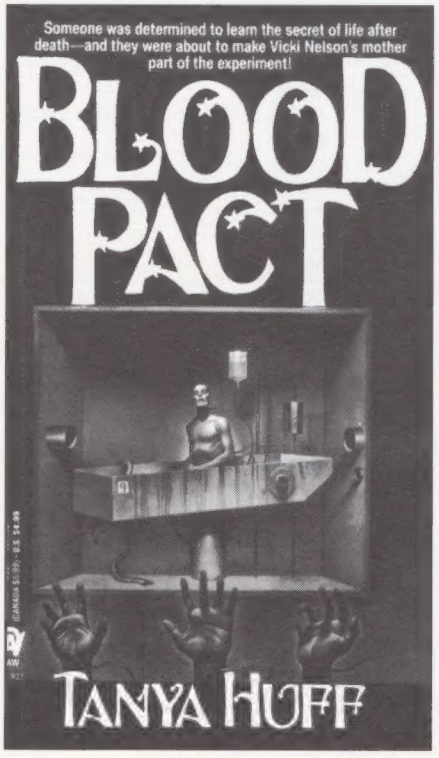
Someone was determined to learn the secret of life after death—and they were about to make Vicki Nelson's mother part of the experiment!
BLOOD PACT
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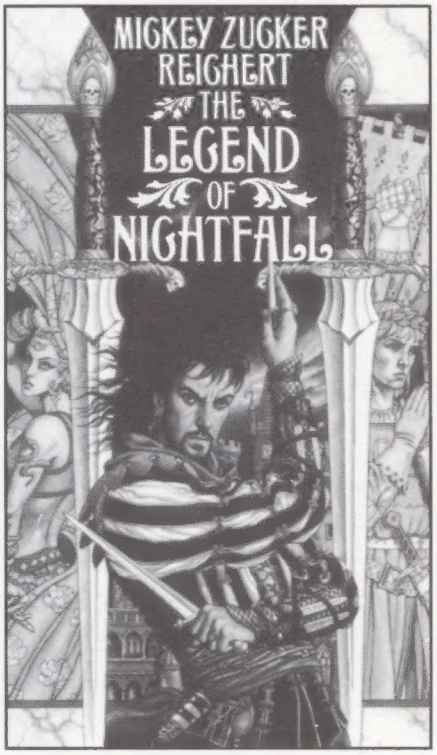

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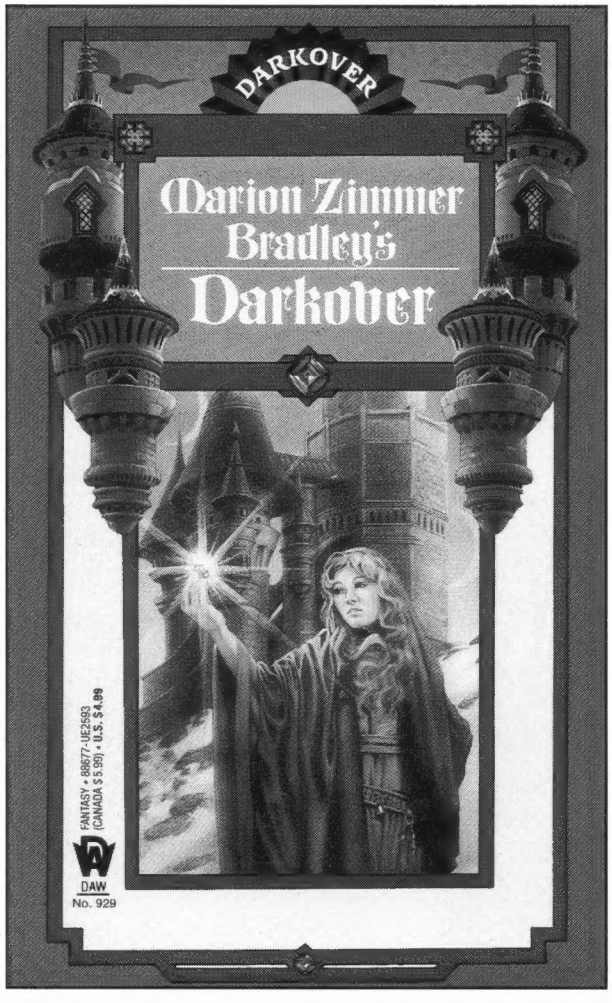

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